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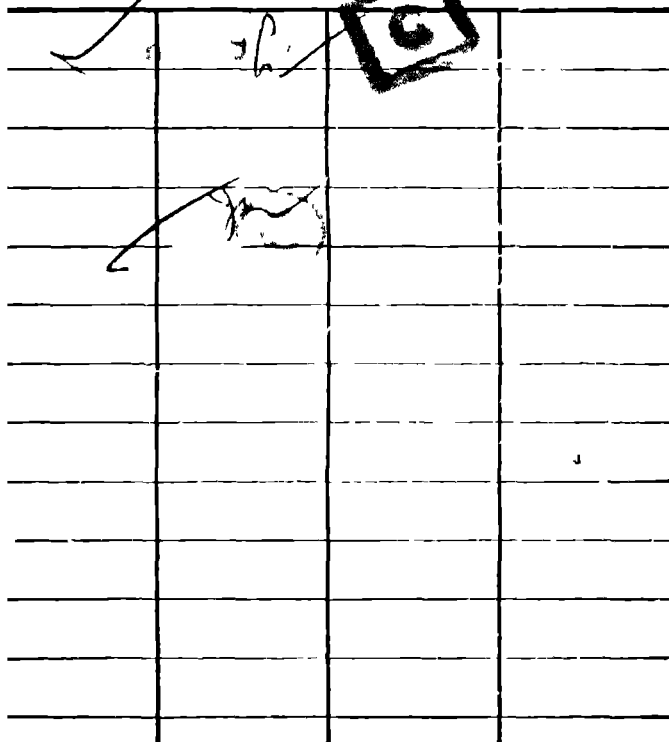
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THE BROADCAST WORD

By
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STUDIES, LONDON HONORARY SECRETARY OF THE D.B.C. ADVISORY
COMMITTEE ON SPOKEN ENGLISH

The pronunciation is the actual living form or forms of a word, that is *the word itself* of which the current spelling is only a symbolization — generally indeed only the traditionally preserved symbolization of an earlier form, sometimes imperfect to begin with, still oftener corrupted in its passage to our time. — *Oxford English Dictionary*



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“ Speech is the only benefit man hath to express his excellency of mind above other creatures It is the Instrument of Society ”—BEN JONSON

PREFACE

The circumstances in which the various talks, lectures, and essays that go to the making of this book were spoken and written, make it inevitable that there should be some repetition of ideas and possibly of language. Wherever it has been thought desirable, the original versions have been modified so as to remove as much as possible of this repetition without interfering unduly with the sequence of ideas. Some, however, remains, and it is to be hoped that readers will forgive it.

The publication of this material in book form is due entirely to the courtesy of the British Broadcasting Corporation, who have readily granted permission to republish matter that was originally written for them. The article "On Reading Aloud", which first appeared in *The Listener* was written as the introduction to the series of gramophone records of Biblical Readings produced by the Linguaphone Institute, to whom my thanks are due for permission to republish. The chapter called "Standards in Speech", originally read before the Philological Society of Great Britain, was printed in the *Quarterly Journal of American Speech*, published by the Columbia University Press. My thanks are due to the Editor, Professor Cabell Greet, both for giving the paper a place in his journal, and for permission to republish it here.

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NOTE ON PHONETIC SYMBOLS USED IN THIS BOOK

It is impossible to represent on paper all the details and varieties of pronunciation dealt with in this book. Some are described verbally, some are represented by modified spellings, and some are transcribed into the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association. These appear in thick type, enclosed in square brackets, they are used very sparingly. Ordinary Roman letters in this alphabet have their normal values as a rule, the vowels having the "continental" values. The vowel and unfamiliar consonant symbols used are the following, with their approximate equivalents —

Vowels

- i** Long as in *be*, short as in *big*
- ɪ** Long as in North Welsh *ty* (house), short as in North Welsh *llyn* (lake)
- e** Long as in German *meer*, *mehr*, short as in English *get*
- ɛ** Long as in French *père*, short as in French *très*
- æ** As in Southern English *pat*
- a** As in French *patte* or Northern English *pat*
- ɑ** As in English *calm*
- ɔ** Long as in English *nought*, short as in English *not*
- o** As in French *beau*
- u** Long as in English *pool*, short as in English *pull*
- ə** The sound heard in many unaccented syllables in English, e.g. the first syllable in *around*, the second in *caravan*, the last in *letter*, *Asia*, etc
- y** As in French *plus*
- ɯ** The vowel *u* pronounced with unrounded lips
- j** The sound of *y* in *yes*

The symbol **ː** after a vowel indicates that the sound is long

Consonants —The ordinary Roman letters have their usual values the following symbols have the values indicated

- θ The sound of *th* as in *thin*
- ð The sound of *th* as in *then*
- tʃ The sound of *ch* as in *church*
- dʒ The sound of *j* and *dge* in *judge*
- ʒ The sound of *s* as in *measure*
- ɹ The sound of *ll* in Welsh, e g *Llanelly*

The symbol ' placed before a syllable indicates that the accent falls on that syllable

CHAPTER I

THE BROADCAST WORD

“ Custom is the most certain Mistress of Language, as the public stamp makes the current money Yet when I name Custom, I understand not the vulgar Custom for that were a precept no less dangerous to Language, than life, if we should speak or live after the manners of the vulgar but what I call Custom of speech, which is the consent of the learned, as Custom of life, which is the consent of the good ”—*Ben Jonson*

THE BROADCAST WORD

It is generally agreed that the invention of printing which as far as the Western world is concerned took place some five hundred years ago, was an event of considerable importance. Whether it was so regarded at the time is doubtful, and the inventor can have had but a feeble idea of the consequences of his ingenuity. The printing press sealed the doom of the Middle Ages, and settled the fate of those early broadcasters—troubadours, minstrels, trouvères, minnesingers, bards, and professional storytellers—who traded in the spoken word. The rising tide of printer's ink overwhelmed them.

Of the beneficent results of printing much has been said; it behoves us at this moment to notice two facts that we are often inclined to overlook. The first is that the printing press broadcast the printed word; the second is that we have been dominated by print ever since. Printing standardized the shape of our visual language, so much so that any attempt to change it is now regarded as a violation of our most sacred linguistic heritage—spelling. And the imagination refuses to function when asked to contemplate all the damage wrought by the floods of printer's ink that have overwhelmed the world in these last centuries. It is true that they have fertilized many bleak patches, but they have also left their muddy sediment on many pleasant places; they have brought life and knowledge to thirsty nations, but they have brought war and death as well. The printer and his ink have not been an unmixed blessing.

In 1922 there was established another sort of press,

which broadcast the spoken word, and for ten years we have had to rely less upon the printed word for our knowledge and amusement. There were, in 1934, over six million licensed wireless receiving sets in this country, which means that many millions of people rely upon the broadcast word for some part of their information and entertainment. The printing press, of course, continues, and broadcasting will never supersede it. But the "speaking press", if we may coin the term, has brought a new element into our life. As yet it is in its infancy, what the future holds in store for it is problematical, but it is very clear that in the short space of its life it has taken a very active part in shaping public opinion. It is, whether we care to believe it or not, an event of major significance in the world's history, and many battles will be fought over it and by it before it is superseded by some other invention. If it does nothing but lead us back to the spoken word it will have done something for which we ought to be grateful, for speech is a finer medium than print. The printed page is a very lifeless affair when compared with the spoken word, and yet the technique of language now rests upon the assumption that it is the printed word that counts. The so-called literary language, a thing unfit for speech, unsuited to the rough and tumble of life, has dominated us for centuries. It is worshipped by everybody. Those who cannot use it are refused admittance to schools and colleges, prigs and pedants try to speak it, and unhappy people who ought to know better have come to regard its rules and regulations as binding upon the daily converse of their lives. Our whole attitude to speech is dominated by our subservience to the printed language, which holds us mercilessly in thrall. The magicians of this age are those skilled in the black arts of word-magic, and the pen is mightier than

the ear-trumpet Those with a fondness for metaphor may play about with this situation as they will, it is fertile in the extreme, and should be welcome to our magicians Let us leave it to them, and turn from the printing press to the microphone Writing is one thing, and speaking is another thing, as many a man has found to his cost in the studio The literary language is one thing, and the spoken language is another thing, as most of us have yet to discover And if broadcasting succeeds in bringing about a literary style more in accordance with speech, it will have exercised a permanent influence upon literature If it brings about, as indeed it is bringing about, a higher general level of performance in speech, a higher regard for the technique of the spoken word, then it will have restored most of us to a proper sense of what language means, and, more important still, of what language does *not* mean If it rids our public life of bad speakers, bad preachers, and bad lecturers, if it rids us of the idea that intellectual brilliance is in some mysterious way more brilliant when associated with infantile incoherence of speech, and if it rids our Churches of a form of speech that is the laughing stock of sensible people, then it will not have lived in vain And if, in addition, it educates us up to the point of view that a man is neither an ass nor a chump because he does not happen to use our particular accent, it will have gone a long way towards eradicating that social snobbery which is our national prerogative If it persuades political leaders to state their case in the placid atmosphere of studio 3D, where they sit in Arnold Bennett's chair while George Washington looks down on them, in more ways than one, from over the mantelpiece, it will have cleansed our political life of its mob-fever, and hammered the final nail in the coffin of that shabby descendant of the

hustings, the "political meeting" If it presents news to the public without hysterical headlines, free insurance, free dictionaries, provocative adjectives, medical, tonsorial, and sartorial advertisements, it will rid life of one of its pestilent dangers, the sensational newspaper

This is a remarkable programme, and has been suggested by Mr Eric Gill's Prospero, who with his menacing manikin perched over the doorway of the speaking press, has his gaze steadfastly fixed on the future He knows, and Ariel apparently is ready for a crack at any Caliban within range

Now the broadcasting of the spoken word is not as easy as it looks Of the mechanical and electrical difficulties, it is not the purpose of this book to speak, there is abundance of technical literature available This book is concerned with the linguistic side of broadcasting, which in its way presents almost as many problems as the technical side The essays, talks, prefaces, and lectures that have gone to the making of this book have all been written in the last few years, and contain the experience of one whose duty it has been for nearly ten years to investigate the linguistic problems involved in broadcasting, to advise as to their solution, to train some of the official speakers of the B B C in the technique of their craft, and to broadcast to adult and youthful audiences talks upon the King's English That the wealth of experience gained in the course of this work has profoundly altered the author's views on some aspects of the subject which he professes in the University of London, namely Phonetics, goes without saying It should be placed on record, however, that his work in the last ten years would have been completely impossible without the solid foundation of linguistic Phonetics, theoretical and practical, laid down in this country by

such scholars as Henry Sweet, of Oxford, and Daniel Jones, of London. Broadcasting is modifying some of the opinions held by linguistic scholars, and it has brought into the life of language an entirely new factor. The broadcasting microphone, the talking film, the gramophone record, the Blattnerphone, and wireless telephony are all exercising influences of one kind or another in the realm of language; they are having an effect upon our own speech. Linguistic frontiers are breaking down. Germany can listen to England, England to France, Europe to America and America to Europe. The King's voice is transmitted from his study at Sandringham right round the world. Of the political consequences of this invention it is not our purpose to speak, but we may say this of the linguistic consequences: this internationalization of the spoken word may save the English language from disintegration, and this, in itself, will serve to bind the English-speaking nations of the world closer together. *Tout comprendre est tout pardonner* and it may be that *tout entendre sera tout comprendre*. We must learn to become more tolerant of the word as spoken by Americans, Canadians, Australians, and South Africans, and English-speaking listeners on the other side of the world's oceans must remember that when it comes to throwing stones at the so-called British English, they, too, live in glass houses. The English language is a very much more widespread language than the world has yet seen in its history, and the first thing the English-speaking peoples have to learn is that there are many good ways of speaking it. Everybody believes his own to be the best, an attitude that, in other spheres of life, civilization has taught us to despise. Many national misunderstandings are due to simple language differences, as even a short comparative investigation into English and

American intonation will convince anybody. Many Americans are offended by the normal intonations of British English, just as Britishers are often hurt by American intonations. Much of our hasty generalization concerning the French temperament is due to the fact that French speakers use, in normal circumstances, types of intonation that are in English associated with situations that are not normal. Normal German intonations sound preposterously formal when applied to our language by Germans speaking English. The simple and unobtrusive "Thank you" used by the Britisher, uttered on a falling intonation, creates an impression of rudeness upon many Americans, who are accustomed to use for the expression of their gratitude an intonation that to many Britishers seems fantastically fulsome. We are all so susceptible to the minutest details of speech behaviour, that whenever we observe the speech behaviour of others, we imagine them to be suffering from the same emotions as we should have to suffer from before we behaved as they do, which is absurd, but very true. And as a rule, it is the intonation that hurts. English spoken on Swedish intonation may sound petulant, on Russian intonation lugubrious, on German intonation offensive, on French intonation argumentative, on many American intonations casual or cocksure, on Danish intonation flat and sombre. An Indian student came into the author's room on one occasion at the School of Oriental Studies, and stood in the doorway with the light of a window at his back, so that it was impossible to recognize him. He was asked, in a perfectly harmless intonation, "Who are you?" He became angry, answered rudely, and went out banging the door. In the interests of discipline the matter was quickly investigated and it soon became

apparent that the innocent question, "Who are you?"—which meant, to the professor who spoke it, "Come in, I can't recognize you, let me see you so that I can give you a name,"—meant to the Indian student, "Who the devil are you that you should come bouncing into my room when I am working?" A native clerk in Africa may be dismissed for insubordination, merely for answering his European chief on an intonation that the latter wrongly imagines to mean insolence.

This, perhaps, is the greatest danger of the spoken word, the technical details of its utterance, of little significance to the speaker, may arouse in the minds of listeners emotions far different from those that prompt it in the mind of the speaker. We might all remember with advantage a truth that has nowhere been better expressed than in Mr I A Richards's *Science and Poetry* "Not the strict logical sense of what is said, but the tone of voice and the occasion are the primary factors by which we interpret." Indeed it may be that the printed word is safer for international currency until the world has learnt, if not to standardize the relation between emotion and intonation, at any rate to behave in the international linguistic playground less like the babies in an Infants' School playground. What foreign languages sound like when spoken on British or American speech rhythms and intonations is best left to a lively imagination, many of the popular opinions held by foreign nations of the Englishman are due to English intonations, which may suggest offensive haughtiness or impudence to people who habitually use other intonations. And the loud voice in which many English and American men and women are in the habit of conducting private conversation in public places may have more serious consequences than that of ruffling conductors in Covent Garden.

The volume of offence that it causes on the mainland of Europe would be hard to measure

There is a story told of the Bechuana that when the early missionaries taught them the Lord's Prayer in the native language, Sechuana, a highly complex language very inadequately known in those days, the people acquired the doubtful syntax and halting pronunciation of the missionaries, striving to imitate it under the belief that not only was the missionaries' effort superior to their own, but that inasmuch as the Almighty could not be expected to know Sechuana, he was nevertheless doing his best, and the natives paid him the compliment of imitating him

The spoken word is destined to play a very large part, at home and abroad, in our own time. Our civilization will be carried into Africa and the East through the medium of the spoken word, and whether that spoken word be English, Chinese, Hausa, Urdu, Swahili, Sechuana, or any one of the hundreds of African and Asiatic languages, we shall do well to remember that the problems of the spoken word are not to be solved by methods suitable for the printed page. It may be one thing to read Chinese characters in silence, but the imagination staggers at the thought of the gospel of Christ, or a talk on personal hygiene, spoken in Chinese with the Oxford accent. And when English hymns are translated into Chinese, or one of the other tone languages of Asia and Africa, and sung on English tunes, there is a grave danger that the English melody will interfere desperately with the word-meaning. "Holy, Holy, Holy" in the famous hymn, when translated into Mandarin Chinese, and sung to the traditional tune, means "Fresh Vegetables, Fresh Vegetables, Fresh Vegetables"!

Books about the spoken word all suffer from a serious

disadvantage it is completely and absolutely impossible to represent on paper, by means of conventional print, the simplest fact of speech. This point is laboured very considerably, and in many places, in the course of this book. But it cannot be over-emphasized, for it lies at the root of most of the linguistic problems connected with broadcasting. An excellent manuscript may be ruined when put into speech, because the speaker has failed to realize the abysmal gulf that separates the written from the spoken word. Nothing that the author can do on this page can convey to a reader exactly how he would speak the last sentence in a studio, it is even very doubtful whether he would use the sentence as it stands, but even if he did, he cannot possibly suggest, without special phonetic material, the intonations he would use, the pauses he would make, the precise length he would give to the "b" sound in "abysmal" to make it sink into the mind of the unseen audience. But he *does* know, as indeed do all listeners in the country, that if he were to *read* that sentence, in the dull and uninspiring way in which much public reading is done to-day, six million knobs would make a busy exploration of the ether for more convincing or attractive fare.

This is the tragedy of print, that it is such a feeble substitute for the living breath, and it is the tragedy of much of our education that exercise in the feeble substitute has been encouraged at the expense of healthy instruction in the living idiom. The broadcaster's first lesson must be the realization of this difference, and all that it implies. What, after all, is reading, but breathing into the dead bones that lie about the printed page the breath of life, making them live, or rather making them come into life just as if they were being born, at that instant, out of the reader's mind? Good prose

is not born without labour, but your inexperienced reader gives birth to mountains without a pang. Listen to the great readers, the great story-tellers, the great teachers, as they take you by the hand and show you the working of their minds. They may be reading a manuscript or working from notes, but there is no gabbling, no monotony. They have realized that their medium is *not* the printed word, but the lively, colourful, vigorous, rhythmic aspect of human behaviour that men call speech. And nothing that man can do will put any of it on paper. It dwells apart, in the realm of sound, the eye has never seen it, nor the hand made it. It will be found wherever two or three are gathered together, and that is the beginning and end of it. But let us make no mistake about it, it, and it alone, is the genuine article. What your eye is now perceiving is but a hollow mockery and a wretched substitute that the printing press has foisted on you. And it may be that if we had to put it into life before a microphone, the first thing to be done to it would be to throw it away and try to get on the page something nearer to the living thing. Some of James Joyce's prose, e.g. *Anna Livia*, is unintelligible unless spoken aloud, it is never completely intelligible unless spoken aloud by James Joyce and then perhaps he, and he alone, understands all of it. So it is with the good broadcaster, nobody can read his manuscript but himself. He, and he alone, knows the working of his mind, he, and he alone, can reveal to you through his living voice the knowledge, the experience, the character that are his, and his alone. His voice can be enshrined on shellac, on film, on steel tape, but his printed book is a cenotaph.

One of the concerns of phoneticians and others for many centuries has been to bridge the chasm between speech

and print, to invent systems of writing that more closely approximate to the sounds of speech. It is not difficult to write the main languages of the world in such a way that their sounds can be pronounced fairly accurately at sight. An International Phonetic Alphabet¹ exists, designed expressly for this purpose, it is used regularly for the transcription of languages all over the world, and has served as the basis for the recently designed orthography of African languages produced by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. African children may have to learn a new letter or two, but they will at least be spared the idiocies of most European spelling systems. We might with advantage begin by restoring those excellent letters that the early printers rejected—*p* for the sound of *th* in *thin*, and *þ* for the sound of *th* in *then*. We might take our courage in both hands and invent a few letters that we badly need, e.g. one for the sound of *sh* in *she*. But the strangle-hold of the printer is on us, and we are left with twenty-six letters, eked out with accents, digraphs, and ligatures, to represent all the sounds of the known world, which explains why there appear in the course of this book occasional odd-looking letters to represent certain sounds that cannot be represented conveniently without them. Just as π means something to the mathematician, and H_2SO_4 means something to the chemist, so [ɛ] and ['ʧ] mean something to the phonetician. π is the relation between diameter and circumference of the circle, and H_2SO_4 may be otherwise called Sulphuric Acid. So [ɛ] may be defined in certain circumstances as Cardinal Vowel No. 3, and ['ʧ] as a voiceless alveolar

¹ For a full account of this and other phonetic alphabets see *Lautzeichen und ihre Anwendung in verschiedenen Sprachgebieten* Berlin, 1928

affricated plosive consonant, or, if you prefer it, as the sound of *ch* in *chin*. To attempt to write a book dealing with the technicalities of pronunciation without using the technical symbolism necessary would be as impossible as to try to write a treatise on Algebra without the familiar *x* and *y*. But the subtleties of speech sounds are such that no visual symbols can cope with them. The symbol *s* has to do duty for very many different noises that pass muster, up and down the world, for what is known as "the sound of the letter *s*". The "sound of the letter *t*" has many variants in the English-speaking world, and the *l* sounds to be heard where English is spoken are legion.

Still, something *can* be done, and more can be done with a phonetic alphabet than without one. If, for example, we wish to give English people the pronunciation of the word *ginger*, we can write it as "jinjer" but this would be of no use to a German, who reads *j* as we read *y*, and would pronounce "jinjer" as "yinyer" or to a Frenchman, who reads *j* as we pronounce the *s* in *pleasure* and would pronounce it, consequently in a way that cannot be represented according to English spelling conventions. No English word begins with the sound of *s* in *pleasure*, and so we must adopt an arbitrary symbol, "zh". The Frenchman would pronounce "jinjer" as "zhinzher". But he would pronounce the "in" as he pronounces the "in" in *vin*, and the final "er" as he pronounces it in *parler* or possibly, as he pronounces it in *ver*.

These modified spelling guides to pronunciation are severely national in their currency, and of very little use internationally. It is much the same in the romanization of Oriental languages. A language that has no single letter for the sound of English *j* (as in *jet*) may have

to spell the African name *Ujiji* in its geography books as Udschidschdschi!

As soon as *Broadcast English I* appeared, in which the pronunciations of some five hundred words were given in modified spelling, there were complaints from abroad saying that this modified spelling was useless to foreigners. And so the "ginger" = "jinjer" equation has to give way to something more generally useful, something based on an international currency as opposed to a national one. In the International Phonetic Alphabet used in this book, and in the official pronunciation handbooks of the B B C, the equation would be "ginger" = [gɪndʒər], even here there arises the question of what is to be done with the final *r*.

In the phonetic alphabet used by the German radio, an alphabet based on that designed by the German scholar Lepsius, the equation would be "ginger" = "dʃɪndʃər". The official German radio pronunciation handbook¹ is a remarkable publication: it is also an object lesson to those ardent spelling reformers who would solve our spelling problems by the use of diacritical marks. It is the peculiar pre-eminence of Roman that, with the exception of the dot over *ı* and *ȷ*, it has no diacritical marks, and those nations that have added dots and crooks above and below the original Roman forms have robbed Roman type of its noblest character, and added to the burdens of writing. The International Phonetic Alphabet uses diacritical marks with the utmost caution, believing that a new letter is a much better solution, pedagogically, psychologically, and typographically, than an old letter with a diacritical mark. In the Lepsius alphabet the pronunciation of the town *Liège*, as given in

¹ *Rundfunkaussprache im Auftrage der Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft*, Theodor Siebs, Berlin, 1931

the official pronunciation guide of the German Broadcasting Corporation, is represented by *luâf*. In the International Alphabet it would be written *lʏə ʒ*, evidently a simpler and more legible solution, and one more easily set into the body of ordinary Roman type.

This short digression on phonetic alphabets is designed to convince honest inquirers that the representation of pronunciation on paper is never easy, that it is indispensable in pronouncing dictionaries and handbooks on pronunciation, that it is better done by means of a phonetic alphabet than otherwise, and that the modified spelling solution is a mere *ad hoc* solution that has a very restricted value. In this book, however, which is designed not for the specialist but for the layman, phonetic symbols have been reduced to the bare minimum, even at the expense of clarity or possibly of accuracy. Those who have tried to write about the spoken word without phonetic symbols will know how difficult the task is, others must have the courage to believe that when they see such statements as *Nature* is pronounced *naychure*, the author is not being vulgar. The announcers consult for reference in the three principal European languages pronouncing dictionaries that use the International Phonetic Alphabet. They are —

An English Pronouncing Dictionary on Strictly Phonetic Principles, by Daniel Jones. Dent and Sons.

Dictionnaire Phonétique de la Langue Française, by Michaelis and Passy. Hachette and Co.

Deutsches Ausspracheörterbuch, by Wilhelm Viëtor. Reisland, Leipzig.

In the *New Oxford Dictionary*, and the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* and the *Universal Dictionary* by Professor

H C Wyld, phonetic alphabets used are modifications of this alphabet

But a phonetic alphabet will not solve *all* the problems involved in trying to represent visually phenomena that have no visual existence. Even with all the devices and resources at the disposal of systems of musical notation—clefs, staves, bars, key and time signatures, notes and rests of varying lengths, expression marks and metronome figures, we can be quite certain that no two artists will interpret the same passage in the same way. Musical notation gives us note pitches, phrases, melody, and rhythm. Speech notation, i.e. the printed page, gives us very little but the words, and we do not speak in words, there is no pause between each word when we speak. There is no indication of the rhythm, and intonation is largely left to look after itself, our only clues being the things we call punctuation marks, these vaguely determine the phrasing, or the subdivision of the language into groups that roughly correspond with the sense-groups, and these in their turn largely determine the intonation. But we had acquired the rhythms of our native language and its intonations long before we had begun to read, there is nothing in the appearance of the printed page to convey to us exactly what speech-melody we shall use in a given circumstance. A word in italics may make us react in a certain special way, but our reaction is a purely national, and largely personal, business. The German reacts tonally to the comma very differently from the Englishman, and an emphatic accent is a very different affair, rhythmically, tonally, and often syntactically, in French from what it is in English. Possibly it is because we have failed to study these aspects of language, because we have believed that the whole truth about language and languages

was to be found on the printed page, because we have been so dominated by print, that broadcasting has found so many of us wanting. Excellent printed matter is ruined by bleating talkers and lecturers who seem to strive their hardest to make the spoken page *sound* as the printed page *looks*, flat, monotonous, and dead. And there is little hope that things will mend until our schools, universities, and theological colleges realize that we are no longer condemned to live in the world of print, that the spoken word has come into its own again, that a knowledge of the rhythm and intonation of a language is of more vital importance than ability to conjugate its irregular verbs, and that it is no longer necessary to wait until languages have been dead a thousand years before we deem them worthy of the highest academic honours.

The Science of Phonetics is concerned with those features of language that do not appear on the printed page. It can therefore be very much better described and taught through the medium of the spoken word than through the medium of print. It is not difficult to make, with one's speech organs, the rhythm of the word "Manchester" as pronounced by many Manchester people, and to contrast this rhythm with that used by Londoners when they pronounce the same word. The two rhythms can be pronounced and analysed by a speaker, and can be very clearly heard by a listener. But a writer cannot write them, and a reader cannot read them. That is why talks on Phonetics and speech are so infinitely preferable to books, and it should be remembered by those who give themselves the trouble to read this book, that most of what appears in it has been *spoken* before the microphone. None of it has been merely *read*, it has been *spoken*, with all the technical resource, all the

conviction, that its author possesses. Therefore those who merely read this book in silence must exercise their imagination very vigorously if they wish to make alive again words that have known but one brief moment of existence, when they were uttered in the studio, carried far and wide on the magic carrier wave, heard perhaps by thousands of listeners, and then lost for ever. The varieties of pronunciation used before the microphone can be only faintly suggested in print, and much must be left to footnotes and the imagination. Still, those who are interested in the subject will find much to learn from the numerous excellent books on Phonetics that are available, the titles of some will be found on page 201.

The study of language, and especially of speech, must begin with the study of Phonetics, and nowhere have phonetic knowledge and training been of greater service than in the investigation of problems connected with the broadcast word. But it cannot be too forcibly impressed upon those who find interest in the study of the spoken word, and especially upon those who propose to teach any subject connected with speech, whether it be voice production, elocution, singing, reading, languages, or broadcasting technique, that *reading* books on Phonetics is not enough. Practical training is as essential in this branch of knowledge as in any other, and this involves not only training the speech organs to make all the sounds used by man in speech, his rhythms and his intonations, but also training the ear to recognize all these varieties of phenomena in the world of sound, to detect minute differences of sound qualities, rhythms, and intonations.

Every speaking man is, in a sense, an amateur phonetician, just as he is, if sane, in a measure a logician. It is a pity that so many of the amateurs exaggerate

their claims, and criticize announcers without understanding all the facts of the case. Amateur criticism is of little value anywhere, and nowhere is it of less value than in this very popular but very unexplored realm of the broadcast word. Many of the criticisms directed at what is popularly called B B C English are referred to in the chapters that follow, and consequently no attention need be paid to them at this moment. It might, however, be as well to consider briefly the expression "B B C English", to see if it means anything, and if it has any foundation in fact. There is no "B B C English". By far the larger portion of the B B C staff never appears before a microphone, the chief officers make only the rarest appearances. The bulk of the official speaking, apart from talks and the children's hour, etc., is done by the announcers, of whom there are at Broadcasting House six on the Home Service and three on the Empire Service. With the exception of a brief experimental interlude, when one woman was employed, none but men have held these posts since the beginning of broadcasting. The announcing staff changes its personnel frequently, but some of its senior members have been employed for a number of years. The men range in age from 23 to 46. At the present time¹ they include three Oxford and two Cambridge men; their schools range from Weymouth, Radley, and Ampleforth, to Uppingham and Wimbledon. Some were officers in the Army; some schoolmasters, actors, or journalists. One crossed the Atlantic as a stoker. Men so diverse in age, education, experience, and character do not talk the King's English in the same way, to pretend that they do is idle, and to imagine that this way is imposed upon them by the B B C is wrong.

¹ 1934

All applicants for vacancies on the announcing staff are required to pass a test before the microphone, during which they are asked to read a short news bulletin, an S O S in French, and a programme of music in French, German, and Italian, all of which they are allowed to see for some time beforehand, and finally, without preparation, a piece of prose. This test is listened to in another part of the building by a board of officials, some of whom have seen the candidate, and some of whom have not. The board includes a phonetician whose function it is to report to the board whether

- (i) the voice is suitable,
- (ii) there are speech defects, however small,
- (iii) the dialect of English is suitable,
- (iv) the standard of pronunciation of the foreign languages is moderately good,
- (v) the candidates can read aloud intelligently

Most candidates fail in this test, the most frequent cause of failure being inability to satisfy the board under headings (iii), (iv), and (v) above. Many candidates are rejected because their English accent is unsuitable, usually it is too aggressively modern, too much like what is sometimes called "haw-haw"—the sort of speech certain comedians love to play with. Oftentimes the candidate's speech is indistinct, suffering occasionally from those laxities of articulation which, while of minor importance in ordinary conversation, make seriously for unintelligibility over any but the best receiving apparatus.

The standard of performance in foreign languages is usually exceedingly low, even in the case of many University men with degrees in modern languages. The standard of French pronunciation expected of

announcers is not high, but even this low standard is seldom attained at these tests, and the number of candidates who betray any evidence of scientific teaching in French phonetics is negligible. Evidently, public schools and Universities attach little importance to this aspect of language teaching.

The standard expected of candidates in German and Italian is lower still. All that is required of them is that they shall be aware of the relation between spelling and pronunciation in these languages, they are not expected to pronounce them *well*, but they *are* expected to know more or less how intelligent people, who talk about music and have a general knowledge of what is passing in the world, pronounce the names of German and Italian composers, authors, politicians, and scholars. They are expected to be able to read, only passably well, the title of a song or the name of an opera in German and Italian. During a period of three years, during which at least fifty candidates were heard, all but one were floored by *Gianni Schicchi*!

Candidates who pass this preliminary test are taken on probation when vacancies arise, and during the period of probation they receive, in addition to regular practice in the routine of their work, regular instruction in the technique of their work. Much of this instruction is concerned with English. An effort is made to remove from the man's pronunciation such peculiarities of vowel and diphthong pronunciation as are likely to be resented by listeners throughout the country. A man who refers to Europe as "Yawrup" or "Yearup" is encouraged to cultivate another variant. Particular attention is paid to reading aloud, and every announcer at this stage is introduced to the question of intonation and its bearing upon language in general, and the English language

in particular Intonation has been very scientifically studied in the last ten years in England, France, and Germany, and the general principles are now scientifically described in admirable textbooks Unfortunately, we are all so familiar with English intonation that we refuse to believe that it *has* any principles, we take it for granted, just as we take for granted the air we breathe The relation between syntax, sentence stress, and intonation in English—probably one of the most complicated relations in the language world—is one that we have grown up with, we are unaware of it Only those who have tried to teach it to foreigners, in years of practical classes in English phonetics, know what a long story this is, and how heartbreaking it is to teach But hard as it is to teach English intonation to the foreigner, it is harder still to persuade English speakers to understand the general principles of it, and to modify the intonations they normally use, when these are unsuitable for the general purposes of broadcasting The relation between intonation and the literary language is discussed at greater length in Chapter VI, much that is said in that chapter on Bible reading applies to all reading aloud of matter composed in the literary language It is not easy to read aloud a weather report, it is easy enough to read it badly, but to read it well, to make it mean something, to describe to-morrow's weather as though you yourself were as much concerned in it as farmers, or Sunday schools on picnics bent, is another affair Some men acquire a flexibility of intonation more readily than others, some remain rigidly inflexible to the last, unable to remove the little turn of melody that suggests, perhaps, patronage, or boredom

In addition to this, some training is given in the pronunciation of French, German, and Italian English,

Welsh, and Scottish place names have to be studied, and the pronunciations recommended by the B B C Advisory Committee on Spoken English learnt. Modern news comes from all parts of the world, and questions of pronunciation that arises from topical news from Africa and the East are discussed. This information is supplied by the Department of Phonetics of the School of Oriental Studies of the University of London, where the principal Oriental and African languages are regularly studied and taught. But in no part of this training is any attempt made to compel the men to speak or read according to a set model, they are free to express themselves, within the limitations of the medium, as they please. Their training is merely technical.

After a period of about three months of such training, it is usually not difficult to determine, on linguistic as well as on other grounds, which men are likely to prove satisfactory announcers.

Such, very briefly, is the linguistic training provided by the B B C for its announcing staff, but it must again be emphasized that there is no rigid standard of pronunciation laid down. If the B B C decides, after consulting its Advisory Committee on Spoken English, that such and such a word is to be pronounced in such and such a way, then the announcer is expected to pronounce it in that way. But provided the actual sounds he uses in the pronunciation of the word are not such as are calculated, in the view of the phonetician, to be distasteful to the majority of the public, all is well. The long *o*, for instance, used by announcer No. 1 is not bound to be identical with that used by No. 2. But if the long *o* used by either of them is too far in advance of that in general use to be acceptable, then he will be told to modify it.

The B B C knows very well, after studying thousands of criticisms of speech in the last ten years, that there are some types of speech that bring forth abundance of adverse criticism, just as there are other types that can be heard from Land's End to John o' Groats without causing discontent. An announcer who uses any of the latter variety is regarded as satisfactory, but it is not always easy to find men who combine this qualification with the others necessary. The younger the men, the more their speech varies from this acceptable norm, for our speech is changing—as it has always changed—from generation to generation. Change is most rapid in and around London, in speech as in dress and other social habits. The further a town is removed from London, the greater will be the resistance to the London standard. The films, the daily illustrated newspapers, especially illustrated advertisements, carry the latest fashions of feminine wear and hairdressing to the furthest parts of the country, and the young women of Trimsaran are as smartly turned out as those of corresponding social class in London. There is no violent resistance in the country, beyond an occasional raising of the eyebrows, to the metropolitan standard of dress, but there is where speech is concerned, because you cannot put speech on paper. Now, however, the talking film and the radio will carry the speech of the metropolis to the distant parts of the country, and in a generation or two the young women of Trimsaran will talk as they dress. Fortunately the speech standard insisted upon by the B B C is a high one. It may not be particularly popular at the moment in all parts of the country, the "bobbed" head was viewed with considerable misgiving when it first made its appearance, but it spread very quickly among the young, and those who wished to be considered

so The B B C insists that all its speakers, official or otherwise, as far as possible, shall speak a variety of educated English, it may be the educated English spoken by a Scotsman, or a Welshman, or an Irishman, or an Englishman, but it has to be educated, unless there are any very powerful reasons, political or social, why this proviso should not apply. A fuller discussion on this subject will be found in Chapter V.

No variety of English has yet been found that satisfies everybody, everywhere, and of all ages. The purpose of this chapter has been to suggest that the B B C is aware of the difficulty of the problem, and is attempting to solve it, or cope with it, with the help of such light as modern linguistic knowledge can shed upon it.

Standard English and its relation to dialect are frequently referred to in the course of this book. In this matter, as in so many other matters that arise out of consideration of social behaviour, the line between common sense and sentimental nonsense is hard to draw. As society is at present organized, uniformity, tinged it is true with faded shades of originality, is the order of the day, and since Speech is later in this book compared with Dress, let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, to be found in the advertisement of a London hatter (West End) in the *Evening Standard*, 2nd August, 1934 —

"The man who thinks any-old-thing will do for the country is seldom politely or suitably dressed. Informality has its rules, and they are worth observing. Rough felt hats by —, for twenty-two and sixpence, are made for the men who wish to be carefree without outraging the landscape."

Those responsible for the conduct of the printing press during the period of its existence have made it

their business to study the general principles upon which clarity and legibility rest, with the result that the modern printed page attains an exceedingly high standard of perfection in these details, and can be, thanks to many of our type foundrymen, beautiful as well. But this has not been achieved without much research.

A similar responsibility rests upon those whose duty it is to broadcast the *spoken* word. They must insist on high standards of clarity and intelligibility, for whether they like it or not, they are in process of determining the future form of our spoken language as surely as the printer and type-designer determined the form of our printed language. It is true that the cases are not analogous in every detail, but they have much in common. Spoken English, now world-wide, must never be allowed to disintegrate into a series of mutually unintelligible dialects, the forces of disintegration, fed by local prejudice, parochial patriotisms, and petty nationalisms, are a menace not only to the unity of the language, but to the unity of the English-speaking peoples. The literary language can look after itself, it is maintaining a far higher degree of unity than the vernacular. Schools, Colleges, and Universities *teach* the literary language, and teach it on much the same lines in Harvard as in Cambridge. But they do *not* teach the spoken language, and that is why so much discrepancy exists between the varieties spoken in the different parts of the English-speaking world. It is possible that all these new speaking machines, telephone, gramophone, radio, film, and Blattnerphone, have come in time to save the situation. Much hangs upon the Broadcast Word.

CHAPTER II

THE B B C ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SPOKEN ENGLISH

“ The ambition to do better than our neighbours is in many departments of life a virtue , in pronunciation it is a vice , there the only right ambition is to do as our neighbours It is true this at once raises the question who our neighbours are ”—H W FOWLER

THE B B C ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SPOKEN ENGLISH

Early in the history of broadcasting it became evident that serious difficulties in matters of pronunciation were bound to arise, for critics, both amateur and professional, were not backward in expressing their opinions of the speech of the announcers. Criticism was directed at certain particular aspects of the language problem, most of which are touched upon in the course of this book.

Those thousands of listeners who were not in the habit of regularly hearing Southern English disliked it intensely. They hated the southern way of saying such words as *bath*, *grass*, *last*, they hated equally cordially the southern vowel used in words like *man*, which to them sounded like *men*. They disliked the southern suppression of the *r* sound in words like *far*, *card*, *Westminster Abbey*, and its insertion in such phrases as *Indiar Office*, *Americar* and *Canada*. Southern English, and especially the variety spoken by educated young men and women in and around London, was not a very popular language throughout the country. It is possible that ten years of broadcasting have accustomed listeners to endure this dialect with greater fortitude, but there is still criticism of certain advanced types of it. Such epithets as "precious", "mincing", "Oxford", "clerical", "affected", register violent dislike of varieties of Southern English that have a certain measure of currency in exclusive circles. There are, however, large numbers of broadcast speakers who regularly use varieties of Southern English that are not adversely criticized, and

other things being equal, such speakers are preferred by the B B C

Another question that caused difficulty was that of the "right" pronunciation of words. This is no new question, Dr Johnson met it. "When I published the Plan for my Dictionary," he says, "Lord Chesterfield told me that the word *great* should be pronounced so as to rhyme with *state*, and Sir William Yonge sent me word that it should be pronounced so as to rhyme with *seat*, and that none but an Irishman would pronounce it *grant*. Now here are two men of the highest rank, the one the best speaker in the House of Lords, the other the best speaker in the House of Commons, differing entirely." An early example was the word *gyratory*, which appeared in an official message concerning the movement of traffic. The message was broadcast in several news bulletins, and no two announcers pronounced the word alike. One used a soft *g*, another a hard *g*, one put the accent on the first syllable, another on the second. There is authority for all these versions, but still the question is raised. "Which is the right pronunciation?" One world-famous scientist broadcasts the word *laboratory* with the accent on the first syllable, while another accents the second syllable. And so it goes on. The English language is such that none of us dare utter in public a word that we have never heard pronounced by someone else, we are afraid we may pronounce it wrongly. Most of us read silently hundreds of words that we should be very chary of speaking aloud in public. If we have heard them spoken by others, all is well, but the spelling often gives very little clue to the nature of the vowel sounds, and none whatever to the position of the accent, which will of itself determine in many cases what the vowel sounds will be.

A very particular case of this aspect of the language problem is that of the English place name, which is an ever-recurring pitfall in the path of the announcer. It is quite safe to say that no man or woman alive could pronounce "correctly" all the place names of the British Islands, even if the "correct" pronunciations were known in all cases (e.g. Cirencester). The B B C has had to face this difficult task, and make its own pronouncing dictionaries of the place names of England, Scotland, and Wales.

Concerning the pronunciation of foreign words in English, and the decision as to whether certain words are to be regarded as foreign or to be admitted to full rights in the realm of the King's English, much remains to be done, for this is one of the major language problems of the day.

In 1926 the B B C set up a small Advisory Committee to help in solving these problems, it was composed of the following members: Mr Robert Bridges (Chairman), Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Professor Daniel Jones, Mr George Bernard Shaw, Mr Logan Pearsall Smith, Mr A Lloyd James (Honorary Secretary).

In 1930 Robert Bridges, whose counsel had been invaluable during the early years, died, and Mr Shaw was elected in his place. Professor Lascelles Abercrombie and Dr C T Onions joined the Committee in that year. Dr Onions resigned in 1934.

By 1933 it was apparent that the early work of the Committee had been largely tentative, and that the language problem showed no signs of coming to an end. New words come into use faster than dictionaries can cope with them, and the establishment of Empire Short-wave Broadcasting raised questions of a new kind. The Corporation therefore decided that if these vexed

questions of pronunciation were to be satisfactorily handled, a committee more widely representative of authoritative opinion was necessary, and that the procedure adopted in the past should be modified. The Committee was therefore reconstructed, consisting of the following members: Mr George Bernard Shaw (Chairman), Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, Lady Cynthia Asquith, Mr Kenneth Clark, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Professor George Gordon, Professor H J C Grierson, Professor Daniel Jones, Professor A Lloyd James (Honorary Secretary), Mr F L Lucas, Mr P H B Lyon, Miss Rose Macaulay, Mr Edward Marsh, Mr H Orton, Mr Logan Pearsall Smith, Mr S K Ratchiffe, Mr I A Richards, Professor H C K Wyld, a representative each from The British Academy, The English Association, The Royal Society of Literature, and The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

Four of these members, viz Professors Jones, Lloyd James, Wyld, and Mr H Orton, are consultant members, who are instructed by the B B C to prepare a preliminary report upon the words submitted for consideration, this report to have reference to the historical aspect of the pronunciations, and to make recommendations for present usage. The B B C then submits this report to the full committee which, of course, includes the consultant members, asking for their decisions. These decisions are not finally accepted until they have been made known to the public, and until public criticism has been analysed. In this way the difficult question of making decisions on matters of pronunciation is submitted to three separate courts of appeal—a small body of academic scholars, a larger body, representative of many aspects of intellectual and artistic activity, and the general public.

In 1928 the Committee produced the first of its booklets

on pronunciation—*Broadcast English I*—Recommendations to announcers regarding certain words of doubtful pronunciation. A second edition was produced in 1932, and a third edition in 1934.

In 1930 *Broadcast English II* appeared—Recommendations to announcers regarding the pronunciation of some English Place Names.

In 1932 *Broadcast English III*, dealing with Scottish Place Names, was published, and in 1934 *Broadcast English IV* appeared, dealing with Welsh Place Names.

The sections that follow are respectively based on the Introductions to *Broadcast English I*, *II*, and *IV*. In them are discussed at greater length some of the language questions that the B B C has had to solve in the course of its first ten years of activity. The Introduction to the volume dealing with Scottish Place Names was a brief technical note, and it has not been incorporated in this book.

(1) BROADCAST ENGLISH

The language that had its birth in these islands, and was for centuries confined to them, is now more widely spread over the world than any other language, and its history is an epitome of the nation's history. We who speak it, however, are but little concerned with its past, we are responsible, though unconsciously, for its present, and we steadfastly refuse to contemplate its future. In our study of the growth of the Empire we forget that this territorial expansion of our language sowed the seeds of its disintegration. In our review of the social advancement of the nineteenth century, we forget that compulsory education and universal reading have begun to break up our historic dialects, and given to the printed word a degree of authority that it never possessed before. In our

outlook upon the future we cherish the delusion that our language will remain as we know it now, the optimistic even seeing in it a future world language

It requires a peculiar refinement of the historical sense to see history in our everyday life, and an exercise of the imagination to see in broadcasting a feature of our national life that may have a permanent influence upon our language. It is not improbable that this general dissemination of the spoken word may tend to counteract the disintegrating influences that have hitherto always disturbed the unity of a language when that language has, through the political expansion of a nation, become scattered over an area larger than that which gave it birth

But however indifferent we are to language as a whole, most of us are far from indifferent to our own speech. On the contrary, it is nowadays considered essential that those who aspire to be regarded as cultured and educated should pay a due regard to the conventions that govern cultured and educated speech. It would appear that this interest in the niceties of our language is more alive now than ever before, and it has been suggested that broadcasting is in some way responsible for this quickening

We now have a certain type, or rather a carefully chosen stratum of types of English, broadcast over the length and breadth of our country, so that, although many listeners hear daily a type of speech with which they are familiar, and which they habitually use, many others hear a type that is different from that which they usually hear and use. This in itself is enough to ensure abundant criticism, the man who is familiar with the broadcast pronunciation will be inclined to criticize any discrepancy between it and his own. The man who realizes that the pronunciation of the loud-speaker is

not his own, and not one that he hears about him in his everyday life, may resent the fact that an alien dialect is inflicted upon him. The one may accuse the broadcast speaker of ignorance or affectation, the other may make a general condemnation of the unfamiliar speech, calling it cockney, or Manchester, or Oxford. There are, for instance, current in modern English many ways of saying the word "dance" — they can all be divided into two main classes, viz

- (a) those that have the short vowel of "Dan",
- (b) those that have the long vowel of "darn"

Speakers who use the first variety often accuse the others of being cockney, those who use the second accuse the others of being provincial. Criticism does not end here, for those members of either group whose precise shade of vowel sound is not to the satisfaction of other members of the same class may be called affected, or uneducated.

The Englishman claims many birthrights, not the least of which is his right to speak his own language as, subject to the good-will of his friends, it pleases him to do, perhaps next in importance must be ranked his right to think whatever he pleases of any style of speech that is different from his own. Every man is a law unto himself in this matter, having one standard of conduct and one alone—that which he and his fellows invariably do, this being, for that reason, the right thing as far as it concerns him. He dresses like his fellows, and any conspicuous variation in the colour or shape of a garment is usually ridiculed, the style associated with one class, or with one occasion, is not deemed fitting in another class, or upon a different occasion. The kilt is as conspicuous in Piccadilly as the silk hat upon the moors, there are, however, occasions when a black tie is considered suitable by all classes.

What is true of dress is in some degree true of speech, for both are governed by local convention and public taste, with a necessary reverence for historical tradition and the original purpose for which they were designed

Affectation and pedantry are to be found wherever language is spoken, they are not confined to any one local or class variety of speech. The indiscriminate use of *h*, for instance, among some uneducated speakers is a pretension to superiority that may merely amuse us. Such pronunciations as *nevaa*, *faa*, *waaliss*, for *never*, *fire*, *wireless*, will appear an offensive affectation to those who are unacquainted with the class variant of which these pronunciations are so characteristic a feature.

Perhaps it may help us to view this question of taste in language in its proper setting if we realize that it is the same, in its fundamental principle, all the world over. Even in the primitive communities of Africa there are dialects, and it is often a matter of grave concern, when the language has to be written for the first time, and books have to be printed, which particular dialect shall be chosen. The speakers of all but the chosen one will resist the attempt to force upon them and their children a fashion of speech which is not that of their tribe, of their fathers, of the heroes of their legends.

Local pride and prejudice in speech, therefore, are not confined to the more civilized communities, it would appear, however, that the higher a community climbs in the social scale, the greater is the degree of uniformity in the speech. Wherever language is spoken, there is present in the minds of the speakers the notion that there is a "right way" of speaking it, and the larger the community using the given language, the greater the number of "right ways". Every district will have its "right way"—not that the speakers of that district will think

of it as a "right way", they merely conform to the local way. Every social class will have its "right way", so much so that a man's social class will be more evident from the fashion of his speech than from any other fashion he adopts. So it is with English, and since English is geographically, the most widely spread language in the world, it follows that the problems common to all languages are more acute here than they are elsewhere. It needs but little imagination to realize that when oral communication with all parts of the English-speaking world becomes through the wireless medium, a daily event, there will have to be a greater degree of toleration shown towards the language of the loud-speaker than is at present shown by some of its critics. But though we may say that "correct" and "right" are not proper terms to use in these questions of pronunciation, yet there are exceptions for where the different considerations of propriety, instead of conflicting, all lead to the same conclusion (and that is not uncommon), we may conveniently use the terms right and wrong.

The question of a *standard pronunciation* is bound to arise wherever language is spoken. English has a further question, arising from the absence of any recognized authority in its pronunciation. This is the question of *alternative pronunciations*. The two questions are intricately connected, but we may for convenience examine them separately.

1 *Is there a Standard Dialect of English?*

The listener who writes to the B B C asking why the London announcer pronounces "dance" as *daance* is in reality, protesting against having an alien fashion of speech thrust upon him. The listener who complains that the London announcers are obviously affected is

registering, in all probability, his protest against having thrust upon him the fashion of speech peculiar to a class of society, to a locality, or to a type of character, with which he is not in daily touch. Both critics imply that there is a "better way" of speaking than that adopted by the announcers. The listener who writes to ask the "correct way" of pronouncing a word quite evidently assumes that there is a "correct way". In all these queries and criticisms there is implied the idea of a standard pronunciation. We have a standard yard, a standard pound weight, a standard sovereign, and a standard pint. The yard does not vary from Aberdeen to Plymouth, and the pint pot contains as much in Mayfair as in Bethnal Green. Unfortunately speech is not capable of rigid measurement, and there is no standard of pronunciation. Pronunciation varies from district to district, from class to class, from character to character, in proportion to the local, social, or moral difference that separates them. Certain general observations may be made upon this aspect of the question without going into details, e.g. —

- (1) There are district variants of speech in every social class, and class variants in every district
- (2) Local variants become increasingly unlike one another as we descend the social scale
- (3) They become more alike as we ascend
- (4) The greater mobility of educated people tends towards the elimination of some of their local peculiarities
- (5) The general spread of education tends to bring about the unification of the social variants in all districts
- (6) Out of the broad band that comprises all district and class variants, there is emerging a considerably narrower band of variants that have a very great measure of similarity

(7) This narrow band of types has more features in common with Southern English than with Northern English

(8) Those who speak any one variety of the narrow band are recognized as educated speakers throughout the country. They may broadcast without fear of adverse intelligent criticism

There may be other conclusions, but it is quite evident that we are not entitled to conclude that there is *one* standard pronunciation, *one* and *only one* right way of speaking English. There are varieties that are acceptable throughout the country, and others that are not

2 *Alternative Pronunciations*

Germany has attempted to lay down certain principles to be followed by actors in the countries where German is spoken¹ it is obviously desirable that two members of the same cast should, unless it is expressly desired that they should not, speak the same variety of German. The Conservatoire in Paris, with the support of the National Theatres and the State Opera, exercises a control over the style of pronunciation to be used on the French stage. In both these countries there is a "right way", or at any rate a very powerful tradition

In Great Britain there is no such officially inspired authoritative tradition, and consequently our language is particularly rich in alternative pronunciations of equal authority. The B B C has no desire to accept or to dictate any standard of pronunciation other than the current usage of educated speakers. But where there is diversity of opinion among works of reference, and diversity of practice among educated speakers, it is evident that no solution of doubtful questions can be attained that will

¹ *Deutsche Bühnenaussprache Hochsprache Siebs*

meet with universal approval. The function of the Advisory Committee on Spoken English is to suggest to the Corporation, for the use of announcers, solutions that shall be in accordance with one accepted usage.

With the question of a standard language this question of alternative pronunciations is involved, and the relationship between the two questions is best understood by reference to particular cases. Is *dance* to have the long vowel or the short vowel? Speakers of the Northern acceptable varieties favour the short vowel, while Southerners favour the long. Both pronunciations must stand: both are common among educated speakers. It is possible that the Southern variety will prevail, merely because it is the Southern variety, and is current in the metropolis. There is no standard dialect, but here, as in all communities, the educated speech of the capital starts with a heavy handicap in its favour.

Is *laboratory* to have the accent on the first syllable or on the second? Here there is no question of district variants; the two pronunciations are heard in all parts of the country. This is a question of alternative pronunciations, and, since most of the work of the Advisory Committee is concerned with alternative pronunciations, it will be well to examine very briefly the causes that give rise to these alternatives in our language.

To begin with, it must be borne in mind that the language of a modern civilized community embraces the *spoken* or *oral* language, and the *written* or *visual* language. The visual language is generally an attempt to represent by means of visible symbols the sounds of the spoken language. Since it is impossible to make sounds visible, it follows that the relationship between the sounds and the symbols must be a conventional one; furthermore, since the same set of symbols has to serve for all the local

and class variants of any given tongue, there will be a variety of conventions. Observance of these conventions is what is known as correct spelling, and, as a general rule, it may be stated that the greater the degree of uniformity prevailing in the conventions of any language, the simpler is its spelling, which is but another way of saying that the language is highly *phonetic*.

The arts of reading and writing are, in essence, nothing more than the understanding and the observance, respectively, of the conventional relationships that exist in language between the sounds used in the spoken language and the symbols used in the written language to represent these sounds. The conventions are necessary because sound and sight are fundamentally different, no system of symbols can ever represent speech adequately or accurately.

Visual languages are of two main kinds, viz —

(a) those in which no attempt is made to represent the sounds, e.g. Chinese,

(b) those in which some such attempt is made, e.g. English, Greek, Sanskrit ¹

Languages of the first class require a separate sign for every word, reading and writing are not possible until the beginner has learned some hundreds of signs. It takes a Chinese student many years to learn the thousands of characters he requires in order to read a newspaper.

In languages of the second class an attempt is made to represent the pronunciation by means of letters, each of which is supposed to have a certain value when translated into sound. There are usually more sounds than letters, with the result that the ideal of one sound per letter is seldom attained—unless indeed this happy state prevails.

¹ For an account of the world's alphabets see *Alphabete und Schriftzeichen des Morgen- und des Abendlandes* Berlin, 1924.

in Korean. The same letter may have several values e.g. the letter *s* stands for the *s* sound in *picks*, for the *z* sound in *pigs*, and for the *zh* sound in *measure*. The same sound may be represented in many ways, e.g. the *f* sound is represented by *f* in *feel*, by *ph* in *philosophy*, and by *gh* in *laugh*. A single letter may stand for one or more groups of sounds, thus the letter *x* represents the sounds *ks* in *six*, and the sounds *gz* in *exist*. A single sound may require a group of letters, and the same group of letters may represent several sounds e.g. the two letters *th* represent one sound in *thick*, another sound in *then*, and yet another sound in *thyme*.

These discrepancies arise from the very simple fact that a language may have more sounds than letters. English uses the Roman alphabet, with certain additions, and has twenty-six letters to do duty for its sounds. Our language comprises at least thirty main essential sounds, for which symbols are indispensable. Unless a language is fortunate enough to have an alphabet that can provide one letter per sound, then there is bound to be established a conventional relationship between some sounds and some symbols. In time the conventions are observed differently by different districts, and variant pronunciations will begin to arise.

No system of symbols, then, can represent a system of sounds without a series of conventions, and it follows therefore, that the ideally phonetic language does not exist. This truth must have been realized very early, for, although written language starts as an avowed attempt to reproduce the spoken language, it soon abandons the effort, and tends more and more as time goes on to persist unchanged, ceasing to register the very considerable ravages made by time upon the spoken idiom. The havoc wrought upon the sounds of our

language before our own time is accepted complacently, but most of us are inclined to resist vigorously the inroads that are being made in our own day

We are thus faced with the additional anomaly that the visual language is not really a picture of the language as it is now, but rather of the language as it was when the visual language began to become popular. In the case of English, we possess in our visual language a picture of what our pronunciation was, in its main features, in the century that immediately succeeded the introduction of printing¹. The further removed we are in time from the date of the popularization of our visual system, the greater will be the discrepancy between the spoken and the written languages. Tibetan orthography was fixed in the seventh century, and is still current as then fixed, so that a word which appears written as *dbyus* is pronounced *u*. In our own time the word written *plough* is now spoken as *plow*, *rough* is spoken as *ruff*, *cough* as *coff*. What we now see as *dough*, we speak as *dō*, having to make a new word to represent a pronunciation that the letters *dough* once represented. The new word is *duff*. Sound and symbol are by their very nature irreconcilable, and their very nature serves to make them still more irreconcilable as time progresses. Sounds are vague and ethereal things that cannot be crystallized, they arise, in language, from muscular habits of the organs of speech, and change from generation to generation with a constancy in which some scholars have professed to see the regularity of natural law. The inevitable law of spoken language is change, because sound is sound, and because the

¹ In English, the main features of our spelling became fixed in the sixteenth century, so that the far-reaching changes in our pronunciation which took place during the next three centuries are of course, unrecorded in our orthography—Wyld *Historical Study of the Mother Tongue*, p. 15

impression of sound upon the mind is not as enduring as the impression of sight. The equally inevitable law of written language is persistence, because the eye has become accustomed to see, and the hand to make, certain signs in certain orders, and the mind has become accustomed to read them silently with little or no reference to the sounds they were intended to represent. Any alteration of the existing visual language will disturb the smooth working of two processes—reading and writing—that have taken years to bring to perfection. It is conceivable that the two processes would be more easily acquired if there were some attempt to reconsider the conventional relationships existing between sound and symbol. It is possible that if no such reconsideration ever takes place, the discrepancy between spoken and written language will increase with time until the conventions are so numerous that there will be one convention per word, as in modern Chinese. As against this, it is not surprising that there is now a steadily increasing tendency to make the visual language a standard and to pronounce words, not according to their later acquired pronunciation, but according to their traditional spelling. Whereas the writing was originally designed to represent the sounds, we are now trying to make the sounds conform to the symbols. Thus there has come about a strange inversion of the original processes.

This discrepancy between sound and symbol, then, is a fertile cause of uncertainty in pronunciation. The letters *ei* have one sound in *eight* and another in *receive*. Therefore we may expect uncertainty as to their value in unfamiliar words, e.g. *meigle*. It is unnecessary to multiply examples, for many of the alternative pronunciations recorded in English dictionaries are examples of this uncertain relationship between sound and symbol.

Into this chaos of conflicting relationships there must be thrown, according to some, a further convention, namely a relationship between the value of the symbol in the modern language and the value it had in a classical language. *Cinema* derives from a Greek word that began with the *k* sound; therefore, it is alleged, the English word must have the *k* sound¹.

The number of people who are familiar with the original phonetic values of these letters is small, and there is often uncertainty as to what these original values really were. In view of the complicated nature of the already existing relationship between sound and symbol in English, it would appear advisable not to add a further complication by this consideration of ancient values. But so long as this consideration is regarded as desirable, it will be a fertile source of alternative pronunciations.

To some extent the same is true of modern foreign languages from which our vocabulary continues to enrich itself. What is to be done with the countless words that come to us from these sources? Are we to keep the foreign pronunciation? Or are we to read the words as though they were English words? This question bristles with difficulties, and little can be said about it here, beyond registering the view that the question is not one to be dismissed in the summary way that is not uncommon. In early days such words were read as English words. French was read as though it were English, and the

¹ About the middle of the last century the classicists made a conscientious effort to 'improve' the traditional English pronunciation of words derived from Greek and Latin by fitting them out with what they thought were the original sounds. The rightness of this procedure was then so little questioned that there was a sort of shamefaced panic among scientists who had not learned the dead languages. The principle involved is now rightly discredited: we preserve one or two acceptable results, but in most cases have to deplore pedantic anomalies.—ROBERT BRIDGES

matter ended there. But since we have begun to learn French and to speak it with some attempt at giving our effort a French sound, it is thought desirable to give French words as near an approximation to their French pronunciation as possible. The approximation is often a poor one, because French sounds are not English sounds, and because the rhythm and accent of French are alien to English. So it comes about that however laudable our intention to preserve the French pronunciation, the result is a collection of those already existing English sounds that most nearly approximate to the French. The only French sound in the average English pronunciation of the word *restaurant* is the *s*, which is the same in English and French. In the case of other languages less familiar than French, there is usually less attempt to reproduce the native pronunciation, especially when that attempt involves the production of sounds which are usually considered difficult. Most people are aware that the initial consonant in the name *Wagner* sounds like an English *v*, and most of us pronounce it as such, because there is a *v* sound in English. *Bach* is less fortunate, for his name contains a sound that English people have forgotten for some centuries how to make, he is therefore frequently called *Baah*. The further afield we travel, the more hopeless becomes the attempt to reproduce the native pronunciation, and he would be a bold man who would recommend that we should adopt the initial sound that the Arab uses in the word *Koran*, or the initial click that the Zulu uses in *Cetewayo*. A language will seldom accept or embody sounds or rhythms or accents that are alien to those which are its historical heritage. Isolated speakers may use these exotic sounds, but the bulk of the people will reject them.

There must also be noticed another source of alternative

pronunciations with which the Advisory Committee is very much concerned. This is the nature and position of the stress or accent in modern English. Concerning the nature of this stress, little is known beyond the fact that its function is to give prominence to certain syllables, these syllables tend in connected speech to recur at regular intervals of time, this regularity constituting that essential feature of our language, its rhythm. This prominence, which is popularly believed to be due to loudness, may owe its origin to other sources. For example, the syllable may be made prominent by its tone, by its length, or by the quality of the vowel sound it contains. What is important to remember is that any question of stress *may* be concerned with length, force, or vowel quality.

As to the position of the stress, English offers an example almost unique in the world of languages, for there is no known principle that governs the incidence of stress. The words *photograph*, *photographer*, *photographic*, have the stress on the first, second, and third syllables respectively. Some words, e.g. *convict*, *increase*, are nouns if the stress falls on the first syllable, and verbs if it falls on the second syllable. We are all agreed as to where the stress falls in many words, e.g. *agree*, *belong*, *prominent*, *independent*. But there is no uniformity with regard to *magazine*, *apologize*, which differ in the North and South, or with *laboratory*, *peremptory*, *gyratory*, *applicable*, *indisputable*, and hundreds of others. There would appear to be a popular tendency to place the stress in long words as near to the beginning as possible, with the result that the remaining syllables suffer by the distortion or loss of their vowel sounds. The only disadvantage of this tendency is that the resultant distortion or loss of unstressed vowel sounds frequently brings into awkward contact numbers of consonants, and leads,

especially in broadcast speech, to confusion and unintelligibility. *Laboratory* when broadcast with the stress on the first syllable is liable to be heard by a listener as *lavatory*, it is therefore desirable, at any rate in broadcast speech, to avoid throwing the stress too far back. Against this tendency to throw back the stress as far as possible, there is also another principle which is active in determining the accent of polysyllables, that is, the utilitarian principle of keeping the original accent of the root on all its derivatives. This latter principle seems now in favour, driving out older pronunciations, but as it cannot be always observed, it will have to win its victories word by word, in the general rub thus *indisputable* is winning from *indisputable*, because of *dispute*. For an example of anomalies, compare *omniscience* and *omnipotent* with *omnipresence*.

There remains finally to be mentioned the relationship between the stress and the quality of the vowel sound in English. This may best be understood by considering an example. The vowel in the word *man*, as the word is said usually, possesses a certain acoustic quality and a certain length, if the word is placed in a position where it does not carry what we know as the stress, e.g. *postman*, the quality and length of the vowel are altered. The stressed vowel is different from the unstressed vowel, indeed, as we have said, this difference of itself may constitute no small part of the nature of the English stress. This difference is not due to any carelessness of speech, it is a frequent concomitant of that very peculiar feature of our language known as the stress or accent. Any attempt to pronounce English, giving to the unstressed vowels the exact quality they possess when stressed, results in a pronunciation that is not recognizable as English. The degree of difference between stressed

and unstressed vowels varies in different parts of the country, there is usually less difference in Yorkshire than in London, with the result that, or possibly because of the fact that, the rhythm of Yorkshire English is different from that of London English. It is impossible to say which is cause and which is effect.

This modification of the vowel sound of unstressed syllables is a source of much anxiety to those who are concerned with speech. Most of us agree that the final vowels of *singer*, *actor*, *banana*, are the same in sound, although they are differently represented in writing. Some speakers rhyme *palace* with *Paris*, *audible* with *laudable*, others make a difference, being guided by a recollection of the appearance of the words. Speakers who hear unstressed vowels that differ from their own are inclined to be very critical, asking, for example, why *wireless orchestra* is pronounced *wireliss orchestra*.

The unstressed vowels in English are working out their own destiny, and it is impossible to predict what the future has in store. One has only to compare the havoc wrought upon unstressed vowels in other languages, e.g. French, to realize that in a language that has a strong stress the quality of the stressed vowel is but little guide to the quality of the same vowel when it is unstressed. The Advisory Committee believes that this distortion should be as little as is consistent with the rhythm of Southern English.

It will be seen that the question of making any decisions upon English pronunciation is not one to be investigated without much thought. The considerations that have been outlined in this introduction are, so to speak, the academic or scholastic background of the problem, and with these the average educated speaker of the language is rightly not much concerned. But they are the considerations

that are ever present in the minds of those who are responsible for the pronunciations recorded in our standard dictionaries

But dictionaries disagree among themselves, some offering alternatives that others ignore, some giving first choice to one alternative, some to another. If the B B C quotes one standard dictionary, the critic quotes another, and there is no end to argument.

Moreover, dictionaries grow out of date. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has been some forty years in the making, and its early volumes already need revision. New words appear that are not recorded in the early volumes, new pronunciations of old words arise, and gain so great a measure of currency that they must be admitted into our speech. For it must not be forgotten that a pronunciation is not bound to be "right" merely because it appears in a dictionary. It appears in the dictionary because it *was* "right" in the view of the lexicographer at the time when he made his dictionary.¹

Most of the words that are submitted for consideration admit of more pronunciations than one, they are mainly words that have caused difficulty to announcers, or words that have given rise to criticism from listeners. The Advisory Committee on Spoken English has discussed each word on its merit, and it recommends that announcers should use certain pronunciations. It is not suggested that these pronunciations are the only "right" ones, and it is not suggested that any special degree of authority attaches to these recommendations. They are recommendations made primarily for the benefit of announcers, to secure some measure of uniformity in the pronunciation of broadcast English, and to provide announcers with

¹ A supplement to the *Oxford Dictionary* was published in November, 1933.

some degree of protection against the criticism to which they are, from the nature of their work, peculiarly liable

(11) ENGLISH PLACE NAMES

The B B C is faced almost every day with the task of pronouncing place names, and it is essential, as for instance in S O S messages, in Board of Agriculture orders concerning the movement of cattle, and even in sports news, that the names shall be pronounced in a way that is clearly recognized by inhabitants of the places named. Even when intelligibility is not at stake, there remains the laudable desire to pronounce the name in the "right" way. Every man believes that the name of the place in which he lives should be as well known to the world as it is to him, and he regards a wrong pronunciation of it as a slur upon his justifiable local pride. Every mispronunciation of a place name that the announcers have made has brought forth letters of criticism from natives, and in some cases has resulted in angry letters to the Press. Yet it is quite safe to say that there is no man who can pronounce "correctly" all the place names in the United Kingdom. Indeed, as a test of general knowledge, *Broadcast English II* might rank with the interesting general knowledge question-books that flourished a few years ago. How do you pronounce Ulgham, Oghwell, Cahir, Burntisland, Milngavie, and Ynysybwl? Is that a fair question to put to anybody? It is a question that may be put to an announcer at any moment, and often so hurriedly that he is unable to ring up anybody to help him out. No dictionary contains all these place names, though many of them are to be found in the excellent *Pronouncing Dictionary* of Professor Daniel Jones. There remains nothing for the

B B C to do but to make its own book of reference
Broadcast English II

Possibly the most interesting feature of this work lies in the fact that all the information it contains has been supplied by listeners, thousands of letters and post cards have gone to the making of this little dictionary, which is, like its giant counterpart the *Oxford Dictionary*, the result of co-operative effort. Listeners familiar with place names that were frequently mispronounced, or with names so spelt that their pronunciation was not obvious were asked to send them in, and to record as best they could the "right" pronunciation. The response was far greater than was expected and a very large quantity of valuable material has been gathered in, of which this is the first sifting. The information received was in almost every case tested, a personal letter being sent to the vicar of the parish and to the postmaster when such a course was possible. When all that could be done to ensure accuracy had been done, the final result was passed for publication.

It is not, however, to be expected that the work will be free from error, or that all its pronunciations will pass unquestioned, too much must not be expected of a work of this kind. Above all it is not claimed for the booklet that it is a comprehensive collection of all the known variants of the names recorded. It is merely a record of one or two authenticated versions that an announcer may safely use.

There is often a very healthy disagreement among natives of a place as to the "correct" pronunciation of their place name. Is Polegate in Sussex to have the accent on the first syllable, or the second, or on both? This is a very fertile source of possible error, for when two or more variants are given, we are likely to be

criticized for exercising a choice in favour of any one of them. But so long as the English language is what it is, with its unique stress accent, remarkable as to its nature and more remarkable as to the quite inexplicable principles that govern its distribution and its function, so long will there be uncertainty about the pronunciation of English words. There is no uncertainty about the pronunciation of "reside", or "subside", or "residence", but there is no end to the wrangling over what is to be done with "subsidence". So it is with place names. South-Eastern names ending in "-den", "-ham", and "-ly" show a very strong tendency locally to have their principle stress accent on these syllables, despite the general tendency on the part of similar names in other parts of the country to avoid a final accent. So when, as recently happened, an aeroplane disaster occurs at Marden in Kent, the announcer will be criticized however he pronounces the name. If he says Mardén, he will be told that this is only a local pronunciation and that all educated people in the neighbouring countryside call it Márden. If he calls it Márden, indignant critics, ever ready to find fault, will tell him that the place is called Mardén, as any intelligent person *ought* to know. The announcer, not being a linguistic expert, cannot be expected to know that the presence of the long vowel in the first syllable may be heard as a stress accent in itself, that when he says Mardén he is really saying Márden, and it is not unlikely that he will be told that the place is never pronounced with *two* accents. The truth of the matter is, as it so often is in English, that all three varieties of the name are in common use, and that there is no one variant of which it can be specifically said "This and this only is the right pronunciation". What the B B C has done is to try to find out how the

people in the place wish the name to be pronounced when it has to be broadcast, so that there shall be immediate recognition

The position of the stress accent is likely to cause trouble in another way, because Northern and Southern English do not always see eye to eye in the matter. A word like "apologize" has its principal stress accent on the second syllable in Southern English, and on the fourth syllable in Northern English. "Birkenhead" and "Newcastle" are generally stressed, in Northern English, on the last sounded vowel, and in Southern English on the first, there is likely to be considerable discussion as to how these names are to be "correctly" pronounced. If the announcer gives the Southern pronunciation he may be told that he ought to know better, whereas if he gives the Northern variety he may be accused of pedantry or provincialism. And if, as in the case of "Newcastle", the Northern variety uses a short *a* in "-castle" where the Southern uses a long vowel, we really have to deal with two very widely differing variants—"Néwcaasle" and "Newcássle". The only solution of this problem is to regard the Northern variety as one peculiar to Northern English, and since announcers are not required to use Northern English, to recommend the Southern variety for broadcasting, at any rate from Southern stations. So Glass Houghton will be pronounced "Gláas Hówton" in the Southern way, but if the announcer happens to be a native of the place and pronounces it in the native way, he will be forgiven.

We are, of course, once again face to face with the perennial question of Daventry, and all the storm that its pronunciation raises in the tea-cups of the curious. There are people who believe that they are doing a service

to their country and its language when they advocate that a word *looking* like Daventry must *sound* like Daintry. It is difficult to see what would be gained, but it is equally difficult to persuade these people away from their point of view. If it is considered vulgar to say "haint we" for "haven't we", why is it not vulgar to say "Daintry" for "Daventry", for the principle governing the loss of the *v* is the same in both cases? But "haint we" cannot appear in print unless it appears as emerging from the mouth of an uncouth speaker, its use by the educated is a joke to-day, though there doubtless was a time when it was quite respectable. If Daventry is really serious in its desire to be known to the world as Daintry, then it must dress for the part. It cannot have it both ways. There is, so far as we are aware, no Act of Parliament that prevents a town, a town clerk, a mayor, a corporation, a postmaster, a railway company, or an ordnance surveyor from spelling a place name as they wish. The old records, collected by Professor Mawer and his colleagues, show that change has been the order of the day in the spelling of our place names. Daintry looks quite as English as Daventry, and has the merit of saving a syllable, but it is too late in the day! Every country in the world has now seen the name Daventry in print, and most nations are familiar with the sound of it. But if the B B C had really meant it they could have changed all that, one issue of the *Radio Times* with Daventry printed as Daintry, and the battle would have been won! So Slaithwaite must take heart of grace and face adversity with all the courage that her famous county breeds. So long as she looks like "Slaithwaite" she must be content to be called something like it, and "Slowit" will be a term of endearment restricted to her nearest and dearest, who may proudly

proclaim their allegiance to her by addressing her as such. But so long as she masquerades as "Slaithwaite", then "Slaithwaite" she must be to the outside world, and "Slaithwaite" she will be to the announcer. Cirencester must settle her own affairs, and not expect the B B C to settle them for her.

Time was when the spelling of a place name was known to one or two at most of the inhabitants—the lord of the manor, possibly, and the priest, the name persisted as a spoken habit, a congeries of sounds arising from certain physical adjustments carried out by speakers. Like all speech, it had no tangible or visible existence, and persisted by "word of mouth" from generation to generation, slowly changing, submitting to the fate that befell all the rest of the words spoken in the neighbourhood, forming part and parcel of the local vocabulary, and fulfilling its function so long as it served to call up in the minds of hearers the place associated with it. In the mind that received it or in the mouth that uttered it, it had no capital letter to distinguish it from the rest of speech, it went the way of all words. The clerk wrote it on maps, in leases, in charters, in marriage and funeral registers, but the natives knew nothing of this, except the very few. Then things began to happen, railways were built and stations had to have names put on them, post offices appeared, schools were set up, and in half a century every child could read and write. Letters, post cards, and telegrams come to the most isolated village, which in some form or other has become somebody's "address". The name has to be written, it has to have a correct "spelling", and those who are interested in the origins of our place names and the fantastic spelling evolutions they have performed through the centuries will find their story in Professor Mawer's survey.

If the Railway Companies and the Post Office had called together an advisory committee to sit upon the question of spelling place names, the results might have been better. Ulgham might have appeared as Uffam, Congresbury as Coombsbury, Poughill in Cornwall as Poffill, and Poughill in Devon as Powill. This would certainly have simplified matters, but it would have robbed life of one of its *minor* excitements, and furnished the pedant—especially that pearl among pedants, the amateur etymologist—with one less excuse for the pursuit of his folly. Every word has its past, and it is well that we should know its past, but the word should not suffer eternally for its past and be compelled to forgo all development in the future merely because its past is interesting. Many men live down their past, but few words, visual words, are allowed to do so, the moment they show a desire to reform, up steps the pedant and says, "Remember your past!" So we bow to him and pass on, it might be as well to whisper a word in his ear and tell him that English may one day be a world language, but not until he and his shibboleth are dead and gone. The place name is only a word after all, and what is to be said of it is true of all other words, the abiding paradox of language is that in the world of Speech the order of the day is "Advance!", while in the world of Print the order is "As you were!"

It is much easier to say what a handbook on the pronunciation of English place names is *not* than what it is. It is not, for instance,

- (a) a collection of popular local pronunciations,
- (b) a comprehensive collection of all the known variants of every place name included,

- (c) a list of "correct" pronunciations,
- (d) a phonetic record of the dialectal pronunciations used by natives

Readers who expect it to be any of these things will be disappointed, it is extremely doubtful whether there will ever exist a work combining all these aspects of the question. But it is hoped that readers of more modest expectation, such as expect to find just a collection of English place names, with a hint or two as to how to pronounce them with a fair prospect of success, may not be altogether disappointed. It is too much to hope that a work of this kind contains no errors, if we wait for perfection we shall never do anything, and in the meantime the announcer must get on with his difficult task.

Above all, let it not be counted against the B B C that it refuses to honour the time-worn local pronunciation. Sawbridgeworth may have been Sapsed in the past, but it is to be Sawbridgeworth in the future, at any rate when it is broadcast. Some of these historical local pronunciations are included, but not all of them.

In the first booklet published by the B B C Advisory Committee on Spoken English it was pointed out that correct pronunciation was like correct behaviour—the custom of the educated, having regard to established convention, public taste, and to the object in view, which is, in the case of speech, intelligibility. Anyone in need of a half-hour's mental exercise might try his hand at defining "pronunciation", with an explanatory note on "correct pronunciation". Having done this, he might then play with the question of representing pronunciation on paper. How far is it possible to represent visually things that have no visual existence? Sound cannot

be made visible, and light cannot be made audible the gulf between these two natural phenomena is unbridgeable. We can see the effects of sound and hear the effects of light by means of adequate scientific apparatus, but nothing that we can do will ever make speech visible. Speech is a jumble of noises and rhythms and tunes, whereas the printed page is what it is, and it takes most of us many years to translate one into the other. Reading is the translation of sight into sound, and writing the translation of sound into sight—both of them laborious processes, because the conventions to be observed seem endless. But to pretend that *what* we write is *how* we pronounce, or how we *should* pronounce, is, of course, mere foolishness. It is completely and utterly impossible to represent the pronunciation of a language by means of visual symbols or letters.

There is a widespread belief that so-called phonetic alphabets can achieve this end, and the invention of such alphabets has been a favourite pastime of linguistic scholars. A. J. Ellis, the nineteenth-century mathematician and philologist, invented one, Melville Bell invented one and Sweet adapted it, Lepsius, the German linguist, invented another, which has been further expanded by Meinhof, the great African linguist. Jespersen of Copenhagen invented a semi-mathematical system of writing down speech sounds, and an international body of linguists led by Viëtor of Germany and Passy of France evolved another. They are all excellent, but they all fail, because they try to do the impossible. Speech cannot be written perfectly, but it can be written better in a phonetic alphabet than in another.

We cannot write down the speech of any one man, and it follows that to write down the speech of a nation is

impossible Who can say what is the English pronunciation of the word "more"? It may be pronounced in at least seven different ways, and any one of these may vary from speaker to speaker If we say that there is a certain vowel sound in the word "man", whose vowel sound are we to take? Is it to be the one used by the chairman of the local bench of magistrates, by the vicar, by the town clerk? People who talk about standardizing English, and especially those who accuse the B B C of aiming at a dead level of uniformity in the speech of their announcers, should think twice before they speak There is no standard English short *a* as there is a standard English pint, or yard, or middle C (if indeed there is a standard C) It is desirable that a conductor should continue to hear all his players tune to his standard pitch if chaos is to be avoided, but the announcers are not paraded so that they might all tune in to the same *a* *t* and *s* are common symbols, but the *t* sounds used in England are to be counted by the score, and the *s*'s vary like the winds of heaven, from the fierce blast that whistles beneath a false palate to the fluffy breeze that blows through the open spaces of the mouth There will never be a standard short *a* or a standard *t* or a standard *s* or a standard English, and there will never be a written record of English pronunciation, with its immutable rhythms and its significant intonations All that we can say of the phonetic alphabet is that it does its work a little more satisfactorily than the traditional alphabets of the world, all of which have their limitations

In dealing with the pronunciation of place names, the B B C has tried the experiment of representing pronunciations in two ways—

- (1) by means of the International Phonetic Alphabet, in the form used for what is known as "broad transcription",
- (2) by means of a modified spelling with diacritical marks

Those readers who are unfamiliar with phonetic alphabets will find the second system easier to handle, this system is not very helpful to foreigners, as it rests largely upon traditional orthography. It is, moreover, not very accurate, or free from ambiguity.

The pronunciation that we have attempted to record is not that of any particular dialect, it is certainly not South-Eastern. It is, rather, a normalized form, suitable alike for the whole of the English-speaking world. The phonetic transcription can be read largely *ad libitum*; if, for example, the word "moor" is transcribed [muər], this does not mean that you are to pronounce "moor" in this way—it merely means that you are to pronounce it as you have always done. Phonetic alphabets are not to be regarded as chemical formulæ, where the symbols have constant and universal values. H_2SO_4 may be composed of elements that are eternally constant, and $s = \frac{1}{2}gt^2$ may be the expression of a truth that is undisturbed by human emotion, but phonetic letters have none of the constancy of chemical and mathematical symbols. If I say Clapham is ['klæpəm], I am not quite sure that I know what this means, but I do know that in other walks of life Clapham may equally well be ['klæpm] or ['klæ'm] or ['klæphəm], there is no universal or eternal constancy about the value of k or l or æ, etc. k stands for any k sound that lives in the English-speaking world, and the same may be said of all the others. And when all is said and done our so-called phonetic transcription gives us no

indication of the rhythm of the word or of its intonation. The fact that we mark the position of the stress accent by a mark ' before the stressed syllable is not to be regarded as something final or absolute. It is of little use to the Japanese or to the Persian, because what is stress accent to us is not stress accent to them. The more one plays with this question of writing down sounds on paper, the more hopeless it appears—and, nevertheless, it is a task that must be attempted. Some day there will be one alphabet for all the languages of the world, and it will be a "phonetic" alphabet. If Europe and America retain their political, cultural, and financial ascendancy, this alphabet will be a modification of the Roman, but if the centre of power moves to the East then we may expect something Chinese, or Arabic, or Indian, to develop within the next few thousand years. For the present we must do what we can with the means at our disposal but we shall do well never to forget that a "phonetic" alphabet is a contradiction in terms—at most it can only mean an alphabet with fewer and less arbitrary conventions than existing alphabets.

(III) WELSH PLACE NAMES

The place names of Wales have proved more effective in their resistance to the foreigner than her mountains. The mountain strongholds fell, but the place names inflict ignominious defeat upon the Saxon even to this day. The Welsh, as the ancient prophecy foretold, lost most of their land, but they have indeed kept their language. *Rhosllanerchrugog*, *Llanystumdwy*, *Ynysybwl*, and *Llanfairpwllgwyngyll* fill the heart of the foreigner with dismay, while innocent monosyllables like *Pwll* and *Bwlch* may well give pause to the boldest. Such linguistic strongholds can seldom be overcome except by those

born on the right side of the border, and even they, thrice armed and thrice blest, are not always assured of victory at the first onset

In the days when news was an affair of the printed page, the strangeness of Welsh place names was little more than a harmless joke, enjoyed by Welshmen and Englishmen alike. They were read in silence, and no harm was done. It was not necessary to be able to pronounce Welsh in order to read that matters of importance were happening at *Criccieth*, or that a champion town-crier had come out of *Penrhwceiber*. So long as the Englishman was content to read these names in silence all was well. It may be safer in the end if he continues to preserve his traditional silence, but a B B C announcer is in a very different case. He, alas, must pronounce them, and it is really for him that this task has been undertaken. He cannot read his news-bulletin or his S O S message in silence, much as he would like to, when faced with numbers of foreign names, all ominously underlined in red by a careful news editor to warn him of the perils in his track. With French, German, Italian, Spanish, even Hindustani perhaps, he may at some period of his life have had a nodding acquaintance. Welsh is, as a rule, completely unknown to him, and when a racehorse named *Llanrwst* does things on the turf that call for public mention, an announcer's brow may well be sad. His familiarity with Welsh is confined to the names of a few watering-places, he is quite likely to read *Cefn-y-bedd* as *Seven abed*!

There are pronouncing dictionaries of English, French, and German, which announcers can consult, while their daily task of announcing concerts makes them become familiar with the general principles of Italian pronunciation. The increasing part played in the history of

our time by Spanish affairs, in Europe and elsewhere, makes announcers hurriedly brush up their Spanish, and so they gradually become familiar with the appearance of the most important languages of the world. But Welsh is strangely unlike them in appearance, it looks more formidable than it sounds, unlike Spanish, for example, which sounds far worse than it looks. Even *Przemysl*, with its *e*, is more in harmony with the general lay-out of European orthographies than *Ynysybwl*, which has none of the customary five vowel letters of the Roman alphabet

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The B B C has made its own pronouncing dictionaries of English and Scottish place names, but hitherto there has been no work of reference for Welsh, beyond a small typewritten brochure that was prepared some years ago. Announcers, however, have had regular instruction in Welsh pronunciation, as in the pronunciation of other languages, European, Asiatic, and, on occasions, African. They are required to know as much about the relation between spelling and pronunciation in Welsh as in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, and Welshmen who are inclined to be critical of an announcer's efforts would do well to remember that Welsh spelling is not as phonetic as it is sometimes imagined to be. Why the *w* in *Cwm* represents a short vowel, while that in *Pwll* stands for a long vowel, why the *y* has two values in *ynys* and yet another in *rhyd*, why the accent is on the second syllable in *Caerhun* and on the first syllable in *Caerwys*, may be questions that never occur to the Welshman, but they certainly make it quite impossible to lay down exact rules for the pronunciation of Welsh from its orthography. Welsh place names can be pronounced accurately only by those who have a knowledge of the language, and the rudimentary instruction given to the announcers will

never make Welshmen of them. If they suddenly have to announce events of national importance as happening in *Ystradgynlais*, and stumble in the attempt, Wales must be merciful. What Welshman among us could pronounce *Congresbury*, *Alnwick*, *Haugham*, *Meopham*, *Deopham*, or *Alrewas*, at sight?

It is hoped that *Broadcast English IV*, will do something to solve what is, indeed, one of the major native linguistic problems that the B B C is called upon to handle. It is also very much to be hoped that Welshmen will not be too critical of this work, which, whatever else it is, is certainly not an authoritative and comprehensive treatment of Welsh phonetics as applied to place names. Those who require a scientific introduction to Welsh pronunciation can do no better than study Sir John Morris Jones's excellent *Welsh Grammar*, and the little *Welsh Phonetic Reader* by Stephen Jones, whose general principles of transcription I have followed in this booklet.¹

One very serious difficulty has arisen in dealing with the pronunciation of Welsh names. It must be remembered that we are not primarily concerned with the way Welsh people pronounce these names when they are speaking Welsh, but rather with the way they pronounce these names when they are speaking English. *Merthyr* and *Aberdare*, *Caernarvon* and *Abergele*, are one thing when spoken in Welsh, and another thing when spoken by the same mouths in English. In the Saxon mouth they suffer a sea-change into something so rich and rare that they are often unrecognizable. The only pronunciations that can be safely recommended to English announcers are those used in Wales, and of these, the versions used by

¹ *A Welsh Grammar Historical and Comparative* J Morris Jones Clarendon Press, Oxford 1913 *A Welsh Phonetic Reader*, Stephen Jones, University of London Press, 1926

educated Welsh people when speaking English are naturally the most suitable

Broadcast English IV follows the lines of the previous booklets, giving the pronunciations in two columns, one in the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association, and the other in a modified spelling with diacritical marks. By adopting this procedure it is possible to attempt a solution of the problem peculiar to the Welsh place name, i.e. the coexistence of the two forms mentioned above, the pure Welsh form and the Anglo-Welsh form. The former has been transcribed into the phonetic alphabet, and the latter into the modified spelling. Let us take as an example a name like *Llanelly*, which is usually pronounced in Welsh [ɬan'elɨ]. The initial [ɬ] may change to [l] in accordance with the general laws of consonant mutation in Welsh, so that we have [lan'elɨ] as a possible variant. These are the pronunciations used by local inhabitants when speaking Welsh. When speaking English they use either of these, their choice varying with their degree of what we might call Welshness, [ɬan'elɨ] is the most Welsh, then follows [lan'elɨ], which may break down, under the influence of English rhythm and stress accent, to [lən'elɨ] or even to [ln'elɨ] in rapid speech. These and these alone are the permissible variants, and not one of them would cause offence to the inhabitants if it were used by a London announcer. But the Englishman who imagines that because the first *ll* can be pronounced as an English *l* the second can follow suit, is breaking all the rules of the game, [lan'eli] is a hideous pronunciation, possibly more in disfavour even than [θlan'elθɨ] or [lan'elθɨ], which at any rate do make some effort to get the Welsh sound. This sound, while we are about it, is not as difficult as it is imagined to be, despite the fact that it is known to phoneticians by

the awe-inspiring name of "voiceless lateral fricative consonant" If the stranger will place his tongue as though he were going to make an ordinary English *l* and then blow hard, the walls of this particular Jericho will crumble before the blast

In a similar way the Welsh *rh* sound, mutating as it does under given conditions to the ordinary *r* sound, gives us two possibilities for *Rhos*, viz [rho s] and [ro.s] When Welsh people speak English they frequently use the second form, and if this is used by announcers no harm is done So in the second column will be found the permissible variant, oftentimes a shade more English than the phonetic version alongside it *Ll* may be read by Englishmen as *l* when it is the first sound in a word, *rh* can, however, be read as *r* in any position ¹

Another question that has called for careful consideration is the pronunciation of places in districts where English has exerted the greatest influence, i.e. border counties, industrial areas, and "little England beyond Wales", which is South Pembrokeshire A typical case is the town of *Aberdare* in North Glamorganshire In Welsh it is usually called [aber'da r] or in the local dialect [aber'de.r] In English it is never called anything but [aber'de r] or [abə'deə] Similarly, *Hirwaun*, which is an English spelling of *Hirwaun*, is locally called ['hərwin] The village of *Pont Nedd Fechan* is the same place as *Pont Neath Vaughan*, an anglicized form that is invariably used when English is spoken, and may be used even when Welsh is spoken *Porthcawl* has become completely anglicized into [pɒrθ'kɔ l], a form now common in Welsh as well as in English, *Penclawdd*, however, is only seldom known as [pen'klo ɒ], [pen'klaʊɒ] is the

¹ Cf J Morris Jones's *Welsh Grammar*, § 22

only permissible version *Llay* in Denbighshire is known as [ɬaɪ], but there exists alongside this purely Welsh form, a pronunciation [tə], derived from the English version [leɪ]. When such cases exist, it has been thought advisable to recommend announcers to use the recognized local English form, but the line must be drawn somewhere, and it is not to be expected that the pronunciations recorded will in all cases go unchallenged. Moreover, few variant pronunciations are included.

The whole question of the pronunciation of Welsh place names in English is but another example of the general linguistic chaos which results in our pronouncing *Paris* in the English way, *Calais* in the French way, and *Rheims* as it tickles our fancy. An English announcer, who while reading a news-bulletin in English, pronounced *Aberdare* as [əbər'daɪr] would be laughed at in Aberdare, and throughout the Principality. But he would be laughed at, if anything more scornfully, if he pronounced *Llanelly* as [lan'eli] or [əlan'əli]. Welsh-speaking announcers can look after themselves, they can navigate these devious channels without a pilot. Our concern here is with the Englishman, who, always in danger of shipwreck, will survive longer with this manual than without it. English influence on Welsh spellings is likely to cause difficulty in some cases. An announcer who had been taught that in Welsh the double *l* stood for the sound [ɬ] met the name *Kidwelly* and pronounced it [kɪd'weɪli], one who knew that as a rule in Welsh the letter *i* stood for the sound of English [i:] (e.g. *ti*, pronounced "tee") pronounced *Llandilo* as [ɬan'di lo], and *Pendine* as [pen'di.n].

Another point that has called for careful consideration has been the dialect which is to be used for the purposes of announcing. North Welsh differs very considerably

from South Welsh, and in many details. Possibly the most outstanding individual difference, the one that most strikes the ear of the South Welshman when he hears his language spoken by the North Welshman, is the vowel in words like *ty* (house), *llu* (crowd), and its short form in words like *cryn* (considerable), *llyn* (lake). In South Welsh no distinction is made between *ti* (thee) and *ty* (house), where the vowel used in both cases is almost identical with that used in English *tea*. In North Welsh, whereas *ti* is pronounced like *tea*, *ty* is pronounced with a vowel unlike anything that exists in educated English. The Russian vowel *ѣ* as in *мѣ* (*we*) closely resembles it, and a sound very like it will be heard in some London varieties of *tea*, where the first element of the strongly diphthongized Cockney vowel [ɪj] is a sound of similar character to the North Welsh [i], or as it is sometimes transcribed [ɪ̯]¹. This sound enters also into the formation of certain North Welsh diphthongs, e.g.

- aɪ as in *haul* (sun)
- oɪ as in *troed* (foot)
- uɪ as in *pwŷ* (who ?)
- əɪ as in *gwneyd* (to do)
- ɪu as in *byw* (to live)

which exist alongside the diphthongs

- aɪ as in *maith* (long)
- oɪ as in *doi* (thou comest)
- əɪ as in *nerdio* (to jump)
- ɪu as in *lliw* (colour)

In Southern Welsh the latter series alone exists, doing duty for both Northern series. Those who wish to become acquainted with the Northern pronunciation can do so

¹ See *The Pronunciation of Russian*, Trofimov and Jones, Cambridge University Press, 1923

through the *Welsh Phonetic Reader* referred to above, where the North Welsh pronunciation is transcribed in detail, Mr Jones using the symbol [ɨ] for the Northern vowel

It has been thought advisable in a treatise that is designed for non-Welsh-speaking announcers to present the simplest account of Welsh pronunciation that is consistent with accuracy, and to relieve the announcers of the task of acquiring a rather unfamiliar vowel. If they follow the phonetic transcription given in the handbook, they will at any rate be giving a version that is in daily use by thousands of educated Welsh speakers in the Southern counties of Monmouth, Glamorgan, Brecon, Carmarthen, Cardigan, and Pembroke. It is to be hoped that North Welshmen will greet the effort with the tolerance that they are accustomed to extend to their fellow-countrymen from the South. And if any further explanation be required as to why Southern Welsh has been recommended to the announcers, it is that the author's youth was spent in Glamorgan and Carmarthen, and that his parents habitually spoke the Welsh of Glamorgan.

The task of reducing Welsh place names to a phonetic transcription, and of endeavouring further to represent the pronunciation that an Englishman may attempt in a modified spelling based upon the general principles of English spelling, has not proved an easy one, and it is not claimed that the results, as here presented, will be flawless. To represent Welsh pronunciation by means of English spelling is almost impossible, as one instance will suffice to prove. Among the rivers of South Wales, the *Towy* and the *Tawe* are well known. No Welshman speaking his own language would confuse these two, for one is pronounced ['təu] and the other ['təue]. The

Englishman has one diphthong to do duty for the two distinct Welsh diphthongs, namely the one he uses in words like *now* [naʊ], which is represented in the modified spelling usually adopted to represent English pronunciation by the letters *ow*. So the two rivers must, in this modified spelling, be represented by *towy*, to use *tdöoy* for the *Tawe* is cumbersome. Welshmen speaking English often make the two names sound alike. *Pontardawe* is usually pronounced, locally, in English as [pɒntə'daʊ], fortunately there is no *Pontardowy*! But the modified-spelling system used will be of some assistance to the reader who is not familiar with the phonetic alphabet, although it must not be regarded as other than an approximation.

CHAPTER III

SPEECH IN THE MODERN WORLD

Six Broadcast Talks given in May and June, 1932

“ Through speech and writing he (Man) is inheritor of a continuous tradition which enormously enlarges his range of experience ”—*Julian Huxley*

“ Language as a whole, in all its aspects, its words and idioms, its coarseness and reticence, its pronunciation, and the very tones of voice, language in its completeness, is the most perfect mirror of the manners of the age ”

H C K Wylde

“ By accustoming the Indian student of government to express his political ideas in the English language, it (British achievement in India) has favoured the growth of a body of opinion inspired by two familiar British conceptions ”—*Report of Parliamentary Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*

SPEECH IN THE MODERN WORLD

I

In recent years, during the weeks preceding Christmas, when the kerbs of the City of London are lined with toy vendors, many of you have been very much amused, I have no doubt, by the man who sells an odd combination of false eyes, false teeth, and false moustache. As a rule he wears a complete set, looking like nothing on earth, and is a source of endless amusement to young and old. His cry is always the same, but in order to understand it fully, you must hear him say it. Seeing is not enough, and I cannot imitate him, so use your imagination and listen to him shouting out, hour after hour, "Everybody laughs! Everybody has to laugh!" And indeed everybody *does* laugh, which is all to the good. Everybody in his senses laughs regularly and frequently. As far as we know, Man is the only animal that does laugh and has to laugh, always provided, of course, that he is normally sane. What I want for the moment to do is to borrow the coster's words and imitate them, and announce like him a solemn platitude which is that, "Everybody talks. Everybody has to talk"—with the general proviso that the dictum applies to all who are normal and sane, and to no other animal than Man.

No experience, I imagine, in the history of Man, since he *was* Man, and since he began to have a history, whenever that was, has been quite so familiar to him as the experience of speech. He has been as familiar with speech as he has been with death, and he has, as far as we know, regarded it as he has regarded the sun, the

wind, the rain, and the night, all eternally established facts with no beginning and no end, part of his world, part of his life, and dominating factors in the ordering of his ways. Unlike these outward mysteries, however, speech was within him. It was something over which he could exercise control, and it is not an idle fancy to imagine that speech gave him his first idea of deity, for the thunder was but another voice to him.

But this is not the place to indulge in flights of imagination, all that is necessary is that we should try to form some sort of idea of the place that speech has occupied, and still occupies, in human life. For the truth is, we do not realize, we do not even trouble to think any more than our earliest ancestor did, because speech is so much a part of the accepted order of things. We expect it, it is all around us. We cannot conceive of human life without it, for life—that is, mental life—without it could not be. Bodily life depends upon the atmosphere that surrounds us, which, so far as we know, always has done so, life was impossible until the atmosphere was created. So mental and spiritual life depend ultimately and entirely upon speech, and if this is taken away, we shall once again become no better than the higher apes. It is possible, I suppose, to imagine some form of life in which communication from one entity to another may be quite independent of the surrounding physical medium, and quite independent of the structure of the entities themselves, but that is beyond the scope of this investigation. Man, as we know him, is the speaking animal, owing the supremacy of his mental, spiritual, and bodily life to the fact of speech, which depends as much upon the nature of the outside world as upon the structure of the animal himself.

Anybody with a fondness for fanciful speculation may

give his imagination free rein over this whole field, he will have it all to himself. Others would do well to think twice before they speak about it.

Let us move on to consider another aspect of the question, for in these talks we must move quickly, and we cannot always establish the order of the phenomena, or link them into a chain of connected facts.

Whether oral or visual communication came first nobody can tell, but it is fairly clear that a visual system based upon the spoken word, that is, some form of writing messages on bark, stamping them on bricks, carving them on stone, was a very late development in our story, and we are not at this moment concerned with the origins of things. But we are very much concerned with the facts as they are to-day, for here again we do not usually think any more about the present state of things than our early ancestor did about the affair as it was in his day. We accept the printed word much as we accept the spoken word. If anything, we treat it with a little more respect, we are a little more afraid of it. A good deal of our early life is taken up with acquiring the business of the spoken word, and almost more still in learning the long and wearisome technique of making the printed or written word, and translating it into sound. "Everybody writes. Everybody has to write," for no man is educated, cultured, civilized, until he can do the language trick in both its forms. And so "Everybody has to write." The first step in the spread of civilization is the teaching of reading and writing, and the aim of the modern civilized State is a hundred per cent literacy.

Now what precisely is the relation between these two forms of communication? How far does the one represent the other, and what are their limitations?

The spoken word is made by the speech organs, transmitted by means of vibrations in the air, and apprehended by the ear. It perishes almost as soon as it is made, and its effective range is limited to relatively short distances. Without the aid of machines it is sadly restricted as to time and space. The printed or written word is made by the hand, transmitted by means of vibrations in the ether, and apprehended by the eye. It is as permanent as the material used in the making of it, and may be sent from one end of the world to the other.

It will therefore be seen that the two means of communication have nothing physical in common. One is concerned with audible phenomena, and the other with visible phenomena, and nothing will make sound visible or light audible. Complicated apparatus can make the effects of sound visible, and the effects of light audible, but that is another story. Print has nothing in common with speech, except the conventional bond of meaning. It is completely and absolutely impossible to render accurately on paper the simplest fact of speech, indeed, when we come to look into the matter, we are not long in realizing that the printed page is a very poor affair indeed compared with the spoken page, if we may coin such a phrase. The living words, with their colourful rhythms, their expressive intonations, their picturesque sounds, are squashed and flattened out into a dead symmetry, instead of a healthy and vigorous body, ever on the move, alive with nervous energy, quick to respond to every emotion, we find a skeleton of dead bones. Making the skeleton alive again, dressing it up with the full panoply of speech, is a great game, at which some are more successful than others, played well it is a good game to listen to, and played badly it is a powerful

and harmless soporific. The game is taught regularly in all the schools of the civilized world, in fact it takes up a very large percentage of the time devoted to the education of the young. What we call "expression" in reading is really the finesse of the game, putting intonations, accents, rhythms on to the bare bones so as to make them resemble as closely as possible the living body of speech. The most successful readers, as we call them, are those who most successfully perform the miracle of making the dead bones come to life again. This applies also to broadcasters!

But let us remember, at this early stage of our investigation, that spoken language and written language are two very different things, and that the standards applicable to the one are not of necessity applicable to the other. And when, as in our own country, the written language is a few centuries behind the spoken language, the attempt to express one in terms of the other brings about what is probably the biggest confusion of ideas that ever was. To steer a straight course through this troubled water is almost beyond human skill, and the few who succeed are regarded as freaks. Written language is the dominant factor in modern civilization: we worship it, and bow down to it, and invest it with all the sacred mystery of an African ju-ju. It has ceased to be a means to an end, and has become an end in itself. Here, evidently, is a case for more light!

There is a further complication. Indeed, the language story is full of complexities, nobody has yet quite seen to the end of it.

The simple form of speech, designed for the rough and tumble of life, for the expression of our ordinary needs and desires, is a thing of short sentences and abbreviations and gestures. It is a means to an end,

and the end is of much greater importance than the means. Quite different is the more formal sort of speech, suitable for the expression of our highest hopes and fears, our aspirations and our beliefs, suitable for addressing beings superior to our mortal fellows—a form of speech in which conscious attention is paid to the means, in which the means themselves may acquire serious significance. This ceremonious form will insist upon its own rules, its own means, and will tend to become the prerogative of the priest and the mandarin, the witch doctor and the taboo merchant, who have always deceived humbler mortals by their parade of wisdom, and still do, indeed, in our own country.

This may be a rudimentary analysis of the situation, but it will serve for the present. What we want at the moment is to lay hold of the fundamental idea, that there is a form of language called variously the Colloquial, or the Vernacular, or the Spoken Language, and another called the Classical, or the Literary, or the Written Language. Each has its function, and the standards applied to the one must not, indeed, *can* not, be applied to the other.¹ We do not usually address deities, or public meetings, or make funeral orations, in the vernacular, and we do not usually speak to our friends, or order a meal, in the literary language. The modern civilized social state is such a complex affair that it requires an exceptionally nice sense of discrimination to know precisely when to use which form of language, and how to mix them according to the occasion. One of our safest guides in forming judgments upon education and character, one which most of us sooner or later fall back upon

¹ "Of these two kinds of speech, also, the vernacular is the nobler. It is the nobler as being natural to us, whereas the other is rather of an artificial kind"—Dante *De Vulgari Eloquentia*

when we assess our fellows, is their handling of this difficult situation. And the use of one form of language in circumstances usually associated with the other is, when not irreverent, either humorous, pathetic, pedantic, or merely silly. Let us leave it there, we can all learn much from a realization of this fact, and many mistaken ideas may be put right. It is not a mark of anything but inadequate understanding of this fact to attempt to make the vernacular language sound too much like what one imagines the literary language ought to be. We do not usually write the vernacular, unless, of course, we are intent upon reproducing it, and how few do it well is manifest from the stilted dialogue of many a film. Nor do we speak the literary language unless the occasion is one which is regarded as suitable for the performance of this elevated variety of speech.

And one last word before we leave this question. The literary language is more frequently written than the vernacular, it has acquired a high degree of prestige in our schools and universities, and is studied to the entire exclusion of the other. There are signs that the tyranny of print, under which we have lived since the days of the Renaissance, may give way to a more emancipated era of the spoken word, which is now broadcast as freely as print is disseminated. Wireless is making of us a nation of speech critics, and may restore good spoken English to a place of honour.

This is not the place to go into a detailed account of the mechanism by means of which Man is able to speak. But we should all of us do well to remember occasionally that it is a mechanism of sorts, in which valves have to open and close, in which masses of flesh are hurled about with incredible rapidity, in which delicate adjustments have to be made at lightning speed, and all by

organs primarily designed for other purposes. Read two lines of this page aloud, and then write down an exact account of every adjustment made by every part of your body that was active while you were performing—leaving out of account, if you like, the movements of the eyes. Measure, if you can, the time taken in the performance of any one adjustment, reading at any speed you choose. Carry out all the movements of speech silently, and pay conscious attention to what is going on, listening to all the accidental flaps and clicks, think of the thousands of times you have made the *l* sound for example, without in the least knowing how you made it. Then, when you know something about it, you will understand how and why it is that things are what they are, why one adjustment is crowded out, why one overlaps another, why one is late, and so on. What a game it is, and how little we know about it! We believe we ought to speak *as* we write and *what* we write, and that because we write a thing we ought to sound it. Hence all the trouble! Hence people who say that you must sound the *t* in *often*, that the only correct pronunciation of *horse-shoe* is *horce-shoe*, which nobody uses, and that what everybody says—*horshshoe*—is a vulgarism! And while you are making the acquaintance of your talking apparatus, learn another of its, or rather your, limitations. See how little control you have over it, and how difficult it is to make it perform an adjustment that it has never performed before. Isn't it remarkable that men who can fly, ride, shoot big game, govern provinces, build ships or invent wonderful machines, often find it almost beyond their power to force their speech apparatus to function in an unfamiliar way—in other words, to make a new vowel sound, a foreign consonant, to pick up a new speech rhythm or an intonation. As children,

as squalling babes, we could make dozens of speech noises, and if we had been caught young we could have been taught to make the sounds, the rhythm, and the intonation of any language. But all our technical training was spent in acquiring the mother tongue, and all else suffered in the process. Our speaking apparatus will work in one way, along one narrow track, and can only be persuaded to depart from this groove with much effort. Which is a pity! Why not do something about it? Why not carry on deliberate training of the speech apparatus throughout youth, so that at the age of sixteen, say, we should be able to pronounce any language moderately well, and our own very well.

Let me conclude with a practical problem. I take it that you understand me at the moment. I know from experience that I have no speech defects, that I do not stammer, and that I, like yourself, am generally understood if I take the trouble to talk clearly. If you do not understand me, then the chances are that the fault is either in you or in your receiving apparatus. Do you hear every solitary sound I utter, whether this noise is an *s* or an *f*? Can you tell whether I am saying *vee* or *the*? Some years ago when I carried out a similar experiment we had startling results. But I expect apparatus has improved since then. And we all know the limitations of the telephone and the gramophone, which handle some sounds very badly indeed. Nevertheless, despite these deficiencies in apparatus, we understand, provided we hear enough for our purpose. Just how much is enough is a wonderful story, and one about which we know very little. If, for instance, I lisp, you understand. If I lisp *and* have the greatest difficulty over the *r* sound, you still understand. If my soft palate is paralysed and I talk like this, do you still understand?

If I do what so many people do—make all my vowel sounds alike and talk like this, do you still understand ? Is there, in fact, a certain minimum of noise, sound, speech, call it what you will, that you must get hold of before you understand ? This we can only find out by experiment, and we never experiment with our speech, we are afraid of the consequences. The probability is that there is, and that it consists of sounds, rhythm, and intonation. The English language on an unfamiliar rhythm, e.g. French rhythm, sounds odd, and often quite unintelligible, as, for example, “Will you please to give me a ticket to Tottenham Court Road ?”¹ Try this yourself. Try to read a sentence of English putting the same accent on every syllable and making all the syllables exactly equally long. And study the effect of intonation. Try reading a sentence on a fanciful intonation, on the intonation of German or French. Is this English, for example “Can you tell me the way to Tottenham Court Road ?”¹

Sometimes I like to compare speech with radio. Every man is both a transmitting station and a receiving station. As a transmitter he sends out speech, i.e. his mother tongue, on a certain wave-length, as it were, i.e. a certain rhythm and intonation. As a receiver he is tuned to receive his mother tongue on this wave-length, and any variation in the normal wave-length will immediately endanger reception. The easiest way to be unintelligible in a language is to speak it on a wrong rhythm, and incidentally to imagine that we can pick up a foreign rhythm or a foreign intonation easily, is a common mistake. Rhythm, and rhythm alone, is often the determining factor in intelligibility, and one of the most

¹ These examples were spoken with French sounds rhythm, and intonation

disturbing features in the English-speaking world to-day is the fact that the rhythm of British English is so markedly different from the rhythm of American English. What we call the American drawl, and what Americans call the British clipped syllables, are in reality differences of rhythm, and here there will have to be mutual concessions if English is to remain one and indivisible throughout the English-speaking world.

II

Since speech, as we have seen, is essentially an affair of sound, it follows that it is in the realm of sound that we must look for the explanation of the simple facts concerning the structure of speech.

We need not concern ourselves with understanding precisely what sound is, it is sufficient for us to realize that there is something in the world around us of which we become aware by means of the ear. That something is sound. It is the function of the physicist to determine as far as he can the nature of this something, the physiologist and the psychologist must determine how we become aware of it. We need not here concern ourselves with their labours, but we would do well to remember that the simplest facts of speech cannot be really and thoroughly understood without, at any rate, an acknowledgment of the fact that physical, physiological, and psychological considerations must never be ignored. And since in civilized communities the spoken language is never entirely divorced from the written language, we are concerned not only with the psychology of sound but with that of sight, and masses of other really irrelevant considerations, and we are always, as we noticed in our first talk, in a maze of confused ideas. Let us examine a practical case. Is *nephew*

to be pronounced with a *v* or an *f*? Who can tell? We took the spoken word from the French, who use a *v*. Somebody remembered that the written word in Latin had a *ph*, and imagined he was doing a noble service by putting a *ph* in the English written word, *ph* being a Latin attempt at a purely Greek device for the representation of a sound that had originally nothing to do with *f* in early Greek, but which became *f* in later times. And since *ph* stands for *f* in Greek words, it is translated into *f* in a French word that never had the *f* sound. And there are people who believe that *neffew* is the only "correct" pronunciation, that *nevvev* is a vulgarnism, and so on. Was there ever such a jumble of ideas? Such a hopeless mixture of pedantry and ignorance? There is a story told of an American who, being asked to tell a friend what cranberries were, said "When you boil cranberries you get better apple sauce than you do from prunes." There is just as much sense and logic in this definition as there is in the attitude of most of us to questions of pronunciation.

But this is a dangerous diversion, and linguistic archæology is a fascinating subject. The only pity is that archæological amateurs are often fanatical people who believe that nothing is valuable or interesting or cogent or estimable unless and until it has been dead for a thousand years, and that the prime purpose of words in the modern world is to preserve the form they kept in the ancient world. We may modernize drains, heating, light, but not the shape of our words.

But let us get back to sound. Speech is an affair of sound, and sound is capable of certain modifications. It has no smell, it has no colour, it has no temperature and no taste. The perceiving organ is the *ear*, the main organ of speech. The ear can perceive different *kinds* of

sound, e g wind whistling through telegraph lines makes a different sort of sound from steam blowing off from an engine, middle C on the piano is different from middle C on a violin, and s is different from *ah*. We are aware that *ah* and *ee* have more in common, as noises, than *ah* and s. We are also aware that *t*, which is an explosion, is a different sort of noise from *m*, which lasts a long time, and from *r*, which is a succession of noises—whatever we understand by a noise.

We are also aware that sounds may have different pitches, and we have built up a whole system of musical notation to represent, visually, differences in the realm of sound that cannot be perceived by the eye.

We are aware also that some sounds are, as we say, louder than others. We know that successions of noises may create in our minds an impression of regularity, which we call rhythm. And we also know that some successions of sound may produce upon our minds an impression to which we give the name of melody.

Here we are, then, let loose in the realm of sound, investigating what is probably the most complicated affair of sound that ever was, namely human speech, and all we know about sound is what we can detect by listening to it. The better trained our ears are, the more we shall detect, for the sense organs, with training, may arrive at a high pitch of perfection, able to make delicate discriminations in their various spheres. But we all detect certain things —

- (1) That there *are* different kinds of noises
- (2) That there are different pitches
- (3) That there are different degrees of length
- (4) That there are different degrees of loudness

And all of this we can summarize by saying that speech is an affair of sounds, rhythm, and intonation, and that

these have all to do with sound. We are back again where we were last week. Our physical approach this week has really brought us to the same conclusion as our psychological approach last week. These qualities have nothing at all to do with any of the aspects of nature that Man perceives by his other sense organs, sight, smell, touch, or taste. Nevertheless, such is human ingenuity that we have built up a system that aims at expressing in terms of light all this business that is really an affair of sound, and in order that those who cannot see shall not be deprived of the advantages of a system, sound is, for them, translated into terms of touch.

There is no need to go into this question in detail, but I suggest that we keep it in mind, for many misconceptions arise in the realm of language just because we lose sight of the obvious truths.

Let us glance for a moment at the way the written language handles each of these elements.

The sounds are represented in our system by letters, and of these we have twenty-six. But there are not many languages in the world that have as few as twenty-six sounds, and something has to be done to make up for the deficiencies, the favourite device being to eke out the supply of letters by adding accents, cedillas, circumflexes, and the rest—a really feeble solution, and one not in keeping with the general high standard of human intelligence. Another favourite device is to use two letters for a sound that cannot otherwise be written, as *th* or *sh* in English, *ch* in French, *ch* in German, *ch* in Italian, and so on. This is more intelligent than the previous solution, more practical in every way, but it has serious disadvantages in the long run. Another solution is to make entirely new letters, as is being done nowadays in Russia, and in a very much wider sense in Turkey.

This is the most intelligent of all solutions, the most revolutionary, and consequently the one we are most reluctant to adopt. Most of us regard any attempt to interfere with the customary appearance of a written language as an outrage, and the creation of a new letter would be regarded in some quarters as the end of Western civilization.

But in Africa wiser counsels have prevailed, and the new alphabet recommended for the spelling of African languages is probably one of the most remarkable inventions of the century, and one likely to have a long and proud history in the future¹. And it was made here in London. It has had to fight for existence, and will have a bigger fight yet, but the thought of inflicting the stupidities of European spelling systems upon millions of innocent Africans should deter even the most intransigent diehard. It is already in use in school books, and soon I suppose we shall see it on maps, and have to take notice of it, we shall have typewriters with new letters on them, new Morse code signs will be invented, printers will have the new letters, and the world will go on quite comfortably. It is high time we had our revenge on the early printers who robbed us of letters that we have never ceased to want.

The sounds of speech, then, are approximately represented in our system of writing. What of the rhythm?

We have a vague way of representing some of the differences in the length of sounds, but it is very sketchy. Our English speech has a clear cut system of long vowel sounds and short ones, and a very very decided feature which we call the "accent", without knowing precisely what "accent" consists of. We have another

¹ See *Recommendations for the Practical Orthography of African Languages*, International Institute of African Languages and Cultures

very powerfully operative principle in our speech, which leads us to pay little attention to the sounds that are not under the influence of what we call the accent. For instance, we all know what the vowel in the word *sense* is when we say the word by itself—but what this vowel becomes in the word *nonsense* is a very thorny question. All that is evident is that *nonsense* has a certain rhythm, and that it will not have this rhythm if we give the syllable *sense* the vowel it has when in splendid isolation. English speech is pre-eminently a speech of strong rhythm, long and short sounds, long and short pauses between sounds, clear cut vowels and obscure vowels. We English can speak on those lines, that is our way of performing the act of speech. Listen to it.

Good morning ~ ~ ~ Good afternoon ~ ~ ~ ~, etc.
And yet we never suspect that this thing is there until we hear a Frenchman, for example, say

Good morning ~ ~ ~ How do you do? ~ ~ ~ ~
Tottenham Court Road ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

We have recently made a talking film centring round this question, showing a Frenchman in difficulties because he could not speak on real English rhythm.¹

And here are some other foreigners (Record²)

You realize, when it is absent, that this English rhythm is something quite unique. And there is not the slightest indication in our written language of its existence. Compare *photograph*, *photography*, *photographic*—what is

¹ King's English, British Instructional Films

² This is an experimental record made by the Linguaphone Institute of some of the foreign students in the Department of Phonetics, University College, London, at the beginning of their course in English Phonetics. It illustrates English as spoken by Russian, French, Canadian, French, German, and Hungarian students. The record is not on sale.

the poor foreigner to do ? Musical notation expresses rhythm by bars, time signatures, and different shaped notes and rests for different relative length units. Speech notation has none of these devices, and breaks down hopelessly in the representation of rhythm.

And what about the intonation ? Here we have some feeble clues, such as question marks, exclamation marks, commas, etc., and capital letters. They really are intonation clues, although they stand in our minds mainly as indications of the existence of sense groups, and aim at dividing the words more or less as we divide the ideas. But in reality they are our only clues to intonation, along with what we gather from the general structure of what we read. Setting music to the words of speech is a form of exercise we all do at times when we read aloud. Done well, as I said last week, it is interesting, done badly it may have a soothing influence and induce profitable slumber or possibly it may empty churches. The inimitable Stainless Stephen's trick of actually pronouncing his "commas", "semi-colons", "capital letters", as though they were part of what he has to say, is, besides being funny, vastly interesting linguistically. Instead of giving the appropriate intonation, he gives the name of the visual device customarily associated with the intonation. It would add largely to the gaiety of life if monotonous readers copied his example.

And just as there is a peculiarly English rhythm, so there is, although we are not generally aware of it, a purely English speech melody. We are so used to it that we are oblivious of its existence and generally ignorant of its nature. But it is there, and we are very wide awake indeed when we are suddenly faced with a speech melody that is unfamiliar. We sense it at once,

there is probably no aspect of this speech business to which we are so sensitively responsive as we are to this intonation factor. We collect all sorts of extraneous information about people from this item alone, e.g. their place of origin, their social status, their attitude to us or to the subject they are discussing, much of their character is revealed by intonation alone. "It isn't so much what he says as the nasty way he says it" is the popular recognition of the vital significance of intonation.

There are people who stoutly maintain that there is *no* set scheme of intonation in our language, or in any language, for the matter of that. Well, let us see. Here is a sentence from a reading book that I used to use when it was my duty to teach English Phonetics to foreigners at University College, London. In ten years of that work you learn something, and the best way to learn the phonetics of your own language is to hear it spoken by foreigners. The things they can't do are things that you never suspected as being there at all. I will read this sentence to you on three intonations. I have known familiarly for many years, and you shall judge which, if any, is English —

A foolish young fellow once astonished an old clergyman by boasting that he didn't believe in anything he couldn't see and understand.

- (a) German intonation
- (b) French intonation
- (c) English intonation

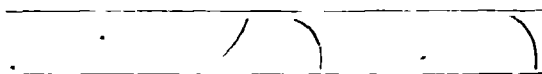
How many foreigners ever acquire English rhythm and intonation? And how many of us, even those who speak a foreign language fluently, ever get the foreign intonation really perfect?

And here is one last experiment in this aspect of speech for you. I owe this to an experience that happened to me when I was teaching English Phonetics to French students in Paris. We were reading a passage from Arnold Bennett's *Buried Alive*, in which the artist was showing a picture to his wife. She looks at the picture and says, "Is that Putney Bridge?", and he replies, "Yes," to which she says, "I thought it was." Imagine these words said on normal French intonation, that I did for you a moment ago. It sounds like this —



I thought it was

Now I will read the passage again, using the French intonation, and you will see how hopelessly wrong it is on the words in question —



Is that Putney Bridge? Yes I thought it was

But suppose the answer had been "No." Now read the passage, and see what happens to the intonation of "I thought it was." You can imagine the excitement of the students—all of them teachers of English in secondary schools and indeed universities, when this was made clear. Then came the greatest excitement of all. How were we to express this idea in French? All we needed in English was a twist of intonation—and don't think you are solving any problems by saying you put the accent on a different place. Accent *is* intonation, and intonation is accent largely. Try it in French. Here is Monsieur Stéphan's version of the story!

- (a) Est-ce Putney Bridge ?
Où
Je le pensais bien (c'est bien ce que je pensais)
- (b) Est-ce Putney Bridge ?
Non
Tiens ! Je l'aurais cru

If there is a moral to this story, it is that intonation is the first thing to pick up in a foreign language, and don't be surprised if you create a wrong impression by using English intonations in other languages. Every language has its own outfit, its own special melody for every emotional state. Our natural instinct, when speaking a foreign language, is to implant upon the foreign words the melodies appropriate to our mother tongue, if we wish, for example, to be exceptionally cordial in saying *Bonjour* ! our tendency is to use the exclusively English melody we should use in greeting a fellow-countryman equally affably. The effect upon the Frenchman is not unlikely to be different from what we intend to convey.

III

We have in two talks dealt with two or three fundamental ideas in the realm of speech, outside the ordinary language questions. We have seen that there is a problem involved in establishing the relation between acoustic material and understanding—a very important problem indeed in these days of telephones, gramophones, and microphones. A machine that does not transmit what we call the acoustic minimum necessary for intelligibility is not efficient and we have seen that microphones, etc., obstinately refuse to handle certain essential sounds of English. We have also spent some time in getting down to the simple truths involved in establishing a visual system of language. We have seen that sight and sound

are at variance on many details, and that visual language, while doing something in the matter of representing sounds, is not much good at representing rhythm or intonation. Lastly, we know that sounds, rhythm, and intonation are essential elements, and that every language has its own outfit of these components. As English people, we can perform the act of speech in a given way, and we shall tend to speak all languages, our native tongue and foreign languages, in that fashion. Acquiring a foreign pronunciation means a whole upheaval of physical habits, and very few of us ever really acquire a good "accent", as we call it, in French or German or any other language, without instruction. To "pick up" the foreign accent is about as hopeless as to try to become a good pianist by listening to Horowitz; you must study and practise, and above all acquire a technique. I often tell my students that phonetics is primarily a scientific analysis and practice of the technique of speech.

To-night I am going to be more general, and discuss matters of wider interest. I want to lead up to the question of Standard English, as it is called, and to find out whether there is anything like a consensus of opinion about it. Everybody has an opinion about speech, about this man's accent and that man's accent. We have our favourite speakers and our pet announcers. There are minor details in some people's speech that drive us to despair, little turns of the voice that suggest moods ranging from superciliousness to patronizing. We are all delicately sensitive to the details of speech in other people, and delightfully oblivious of the slightest mannerism in our own. Some of my dearest friends say to me sometimes, "I can't stand this announcer, or that politician, or the other lecturer, who was broadcasting last night. Why don't you do something about

it ? " How little do they know ! And how easy it is to criticize ! I suggest that we should all, before criticizing another man's speech, have a dozen gramophone records made of our own speech, and get them criticized by a competent critic first. And please, ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you that I am not speaking to you as a critic, or suggesting that what you are now hearing is the English language as it should be spoken. I have made too many records, on shellac, celluloid, steel, and film, to have any illusions left. We can investigate scientifically without allowing our prejudices to obtrude themselves. An anonymous correspondent from Scotland once told me that he (or was it she ?) enjoyed my talks on speech very much, but that my own was far below what good English ought to be. Why Scotland should be polluted (that was the word) with the highfalutin Southern English I spoke was more than he (or she ?) could understand. As from one Celt to another, this was delightful !

When we examine some of the points that are perpetually criticized, points referred to recurrently in the Press, and in the hundreds of letters that reach the B B C annually, let us remember that a language is never in a state of fixation, but is always changing: we are not looking at a lantern slide but at a moving picture. And remember also that we are not all looking at the same portion of the film at the same time. The part that is on show, as it were, in London this week may not reach Glasgow until 1984, and the part on show at Haileybury, or Harrow, or Llandovery, may never reach the council schools of Bethnal Green. But wireless does give you all a chance of seeing, in some way, what is going on in other parts. More often than not you are compelled to see the part that is being shown in London, and it isn't surprising that if this doesn't fit

in with your local show, as it were, you get angry, and complain! But don't blame the B B C for it. No great harm will be done if we all see the same reel at the same time. But the B B C doesn't make the film, you make it.

In a future talk I shall deal with some of the points raised in the thousands of letters written to me in recent years about unpopular varieties or details of speech. Will you give me to-night the benefit of your opinion about one or two vexed points, because information of this kind is valuable, and the only way to find out certain details of the pronunciation of our language is to hold a census.

First, there is a large class of words like *grass*, *last*, *dance*, *path*, etc., that some people pronounce with a long vowel *aa* as in *calm*, and others with the short vowel as in *man*. Some say *graas*, *laast*, *daance*, *paath*, and others *grass*, *last*, *dance*, *path*, with the short vowel. The majority of the English-speaking world says the latter, but London, and what is rightly or wrongly called Standard English, say the former, and I cannot imagine that we shall agree for many years. I have a suspicion, which may be wrong, that in the end the short vowel will prevail, but that is only an opinion. All the announcers use the long vowel, not because they are told to, but because they used it long before the B B C was dreamt of, so if you dislike it—and many of you do—try and bear it. It isn't affectation, and it isn't what so many correspondents think it is—"swank". "Swank" is the adoption of a form of behaviour peculiar to a class of society superior to that of the "swanker". All that has happened in the case of words like *path*, etc., is that in some parts of the country there still remains the form with the short vowel, which in other parts developed into

the long vowel. In the sixteenth century the short form was universal. Why does *salmon* have the short vowel in England and the long one often in Scotland ?

But I do want your help about two words—*mass* and *catholic*. *Mass* meaning "weight" or "quantity" usually has the short vowel, but when it means a religious service, it is pronounced *maass* by some, and *mass* by others. It has been said that it is pronounced *maass* only by those who are in the habit of attending the service, and *mass* by others. Can you give me any light on this ? And is *catholic* pronounced *caatholic* only by Catholics ? ¹

Secondly, there is our very old friend *cross*, and words like him—*gone*, *soft*, *cough*, *frost*, *off*, etc. I would give a great deal to know how these words are going to jump. At present we have *crawss* and *cross*, etc. Which do you use, and does anybody use the long vowel in *moth*, *coffee*, *hospital*, *dog* ? *Dawg* is good Cockney, but it was also good Victorian Mayfair.

If you want to give me your views on these questions on a post card, I shall be glad to have them. In the case of *gone*, *coffee*, etc., I suspect that the question is mainly one of age. All the young students I have examined in London in the last ten years use the short vowel, but many of their parents use the long vowel. If you can throw light on that too, I shall be glad.

Now there is another line of investigation we might follow—one I think very interesting and one that might teach most of us something. We are all fond of talking about Standard English without in the least knowing what the expression means, if it means anything. Who talks Standard English ? Do you ? (The answer is evidently

Yes") Do I ? (Goodness knows) Do Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Walford Davies, Mr Ramsay MacDonald,

¹ See Note p. 104

Lord Snowden, A J Alan, the Senior Announcer, Commander King-Hall, and Dean Inge ? These are all people whose voices you know. Do they all possess the same outfit of sounds, rhythm, and intonation ? Do any two speakers you know possess the same outfit, that is, the same in every detail. Doubtful. It is clear at once that if there is a Standard English, then the term "standard" is used in a very different way from that in such expressions as "standard bread", "standard yard", etc.

Take any one detail you like, any vowel you like in the language to-day, and see if it has a standard value. Take a very typical case—the vowel in the word *man*. I doubt very much indeed whether any two of the speakers enumerated above use identically the same sound. And if we range over the country, we find how many are the varieties of this sound that are doing duty to-day. Here are some —

- | | |
|-----------------------|------|
| (1) South Welsh | [a] |
| (2) Lancashire | [a] |
| (3) Educated Southern | [æ] |
| (4) Cockney | [ɛ] |
| (5) "Refined" | [ɛæ] |

I imagine most of you react violently to some of these, and accept one or two, possibly, with complacency. Let us look at them. They divide themselves into 'two classes —

- (1) What we may call the "close" variety
- (2) What we may call the "open" or "broad" variety

Between these two there is room for many varieties. What I find from experience is this: that if you take all the known variants, somewhere about midway between the two extremes, i.e. midway acoustically, you will get a noise that can safely be used for broadcasting, one that

will satisfy most people—more or less In this particular case I will give you two extremes

(South Wales and Refined)

And here is one about midway between

(Educated Southern)

If we accept this method of procedure, then I suppose we might say—having carried it out with every sound—that we had made a sort of synthetic Standard English (if, of course, we had at the same time standardized rhythm and intonation) In the case of the vowel in words like *bead*, we should have to find the happy mean between—

(Refined and Cockney)

The short vowel as in *little bit* would have to be midway between—

(Scots dialect and Chelsea)

Somewhere between *budget* ¹ and *budget* ² we might even find an ideal pronunciation for this unpopular word ¹

And when you had made your synthetic Standard English, would anybody talk it ² Probably not, but you would have the satisfaction of having some definite ideas on the subject, and you would probably have some absolute standards of criticism You would probably find that speakers who came near to scoring full marks, who had a fair number of these sounds in their repertoire, would, other things being equal, cause you less offence than the others When next you are disposed to be critical, and there is no harm in being critical provided you are constructive, and your criticism is based on knowledge, not prejudice, may I suggest that you try to put your finger on the spot, and locate exactly the detail in the speaker's

¹ A Yorkshire *u*

² A Cockney *u*

outfit that is causing you displeasure? Is it voice quality?, is he too nasal?, is he monotonous? (i.e. not giving a sufficient variety of voice pitches), is he drawing? (i.e. over-lengthening certain vowel sounds), is he mincing? (i.e. using extreme varieties of certain sounds), is he slipshod? (i.e. under-articulating *t*'s and *d*'s), is he precious? (i.e. using "extreme" extremes), is he pedantic? (i.e. over-articulating sounds), is he clerical? (i.e. using certain unusual details of intonation), and so on

And it is surprising what an effect one small detail can produce upon the whole. Listen to this short passage, which I will read in different ways. I will alter nothing in the successive readings but my treatment of the *r* sound, and you will see what an enormous difference there will be in the result upon the general impression.¹

"The grey dawn was breaking as we came down. We were glad to be once more far away from the dangers that beset the traveller on his way over the higher ranges that towered over us. At four o'clock we halted, determined to wait for the bearers, now making their laborious way through the driving rain higher up the valley."

Well, we know more than we did about the question of a standard pronunciation, and I have suggested a way in which we might all cultivate a more scientific interest in the voices we hear over the wireless, and anywhere else, for that matter. Whether a rigid standard is possible is one thing, whether it is desirable is another. But one thing is fairly clear. Each of us has his own standard,

¹ The passage was read in three ways —

(i) Normal South-Eastern English, *r* being pronounced only before vowel sounds

(ii) Every *r* pronounced vigorously with a tongue-point trill

(iii) Every *r* pronounced in the Somerset fashion, rather like the sound used by many American speakers

and the people who are most addicted to hurling bricks are those who are most intolerant of other people's standards

Note on the Pronunciation of the Words Mass and Catholic

The object of asking listeners for information on this point was to test the accuracy of a statement frequently made that Roman and Anglo-Catholics generally use the pronunciations *maass* and *caatholic*, whereas others use *mass* and *catholic*. The *Oxford Dictionary* records only the latter forms. Professor Wyld's dictionary does the same. Professor Daniel Jones records both forms. The letters sent in constitute a very valuable piece of evidence on this point, coming from all parts of the British Islands, from Roman Catholics, Anglo-Catholics, and others. It is quite clear that both pronunciations of each word are very common, but there is no evidence that Catholics invariably use the forms with the long *a*.

Forty - five correspondents (thirty-one Roman Catholic) used the form *mass* (short vowel)

Twenty-eight (sixteen R C) used *maass* (long vowel)

Two (Anglo-Catholic) used *maass*

Five (two R C) said that the form *maass* had a derogatory meaning

One (R C) said *maass* was used by converts only

Forty-five (thirty-one R C) used *catholic* (short vowel), while twenty-one (fifteen R C) used *caatholic* (long vowel)

Two (R C, from Ireland) said the forms with the long vowel were used by priests only

Two said the forms with the long vowel were used by uneducated people

As to the pronunciation of words like *cross*, *cough* gone *frost*, etc., there is little doubt that the pronunciations *crawss*, *cawf*, *gawn*, *frawst*, etc., that were current in educated London speech some years ago, have nearly all disappeared. Young educated people use the forms with the short vowel. *Awff* is still common, however.

IV

We began last week some experiments with certain English sounds, and suggested a way of arriving at a satisfactory version of our English vowel sounds, taking 'satisfactory' to mean "lying about midway between the prevalent extremes". This is by no means a theoretical solution, for it has served me in good stead for many years. I have occasionally to act as a physician in the realm of speech. People come, or are sent, with complaints or ailments in the body of their speech, wanting advice or treatment. It is no good saying to them, "Yes, you talk badly, or you mince, or you drawl, or it's too awful to listen to". Diagnosis reveals the nature of the evil, and the offending detail is exposed for treatment. But the cure is outside my power, that is in the patient's hands, or rather mouth. In this capacity I have found over and over again that the cause of complaint is the use of sounds that are far from satisfactory, again using 'satisfactory' in the sense defined above. And I showed you last week how seriously one symptom or one unusual sound could affect the whole body of speech. Let us revert for a moment to the vowel in *man*, which, as we saw last week, has variants that range from the broad Italian *ah* to the French open *e* in *père*. The first range of variants is Northern, the second Southern, and the extreme variant will be found in the East End and the West End. White-chapel and Mayfair agree that "a men's a men for all

thet" A broadcasting microphone is a remarkably efficient testing machine when supported by the critical opinion of the British public, and having watched it for nearly ten years, I know how it is going to work. The speaker who uses a Northern extreme will be called provincial, and may even be called uneducated, the word "dialect" will be used frequently in correspondence concerning him. The speaker who uses a Southern extreme will be called mincing, Oxford, or Cockney. He will be more violently disliked than the other speaker, and the protest will probably be more vigorous, other things, of course, being equal. Speakers who use an average sound, neither too much like the one nor the other, will usually escape without any notice.

Here are some of the very unpopular extremes of the day —

(1) The so-called "Oxford-cum-East End" version of the vowel in *man*, already mentioned. A real, acid test.

(2) Two extremes of the sound in words like *day*, *great*. The Cockney extreme, often approached by educated Londoners, makes *to-day* sound like *to die* and the version that I would describe as "Brighter London, 1932", as used by my younger and brighter students, who call me "Mr Lloyd Gems"—a very fashionable version indeed in grill rooms and places where they dance!

(3) Two extremes of the sound in words like *now*. The old Cockney extreme, *nah*, is nearly dead, but we have a series of successors, all difficult to express in print, but which I can illustrate over the microphone. These are all unpopular, and considered serious blemishes in an otherwise respectable outfit. The "Brighter London, 1932" vintage is a combination of the long *ah*, and something that might with encouragement become the

long oo, but which, owing to various reasons, never gets quite as far

(4) A similar pair of extremes will be heard in the sound of words like *my* Cockney *moi* rubs shoulders at Charing Cross, where East meets West, with *maaaai*

(5) Two interesting extremes are to be heard in words like *fire*, *wireless*, etc. On the one hand you get the Glamorganshire version, with at least three clear cut sounds in it, while the 1932 London version gives you one sound, which is *fah*, *wah*. More teeth are gnashed over this last version than can ever be stopped, I have known it drive otherwise sane men into ecstasies of passion.

(6) Similar extremes in the sound of *tower*, which is often called *tah*. And it is a little difficult to understand exactly what people mean when they say, "I got a wah asking me to join a sosahty in Gah Street."

(7) And while we are on the *ah* vowel, let us not forget what is probably the most disliked sound in the language to-day. It is the extreme variant of the unaccented vowel in words like *actor*, *never*, *idea*, etc. There is a version of this, which it is hard to localize, that sounds like *ah*. We hear people talk about *actahs*, and *singahs*, and the *u ahless orchestrah*.

(8) Lastly, we have the 'intrusive *r*' always with us, safely entrenched, and apparently a firmly established feature of so-called Standard English, if Standard English is what many educated people talk. It is frequently used by statesmen, barristers, actors, clergymen, schoolmasters, and University professors. "Chinar and Japan," "the problem in Indiar is," "the Government of Indiar Act," "Canadar and America," "a sonatar in A Major," "a toccatar and fugue," "the lawr of England," "then said Elhjar unto the people," are all examples that the wireless has given us. One recent news bulletin gave us "Bolhviar

and Paraguay", "the regattar at Cowes", "the All Indiar and England cricket match", which was hard on the announcer. How will it end? Shall we check it, or just admit it, finally spelling all these words with an *r*? The Englishman would pronounce *India* exactly the same if we wrote it *Indiar*, but I leave the suggestion to others. At the moment, all we can say is that this very complex linguistic habit is firmly ingrained.

We might extend our list, but it is long enough to serve our purpose, and what we have said about it is enough to convince anybody that we are, as a nation, severely critical of speech. Speech has never previously been submitted to such a battery of critical ears, and this is a good thing, good for the speakers, and good for the language. Years ago, a man who had been, shall we say, to a Public School and a University believed that he had acquired the King's English in his stride. But nowadays he must, that is, of course, if he wants to speak to the public over the microphone, have a care, and, if he is a wise man, aware of the enormous influence exerted, subtly and unconsciously exerted, upon his audience by the nature of the speech material he is using, he will get down to the subject, and shake off as quickly as he can the extreme variants that he collected in his early days, in sounds as in socks.

It is, of course, obvious nowadays to all of us that speech differs from man to man, from district to district, and from one social class to another. It is, in some respects, like features, no two of us have identically the same features, yet we all have something in common. You can tell the Englishman from a Welshman sometimes, or from a Scot. You can more easily tell him from a Frenchman, and more easily still from a Chinese. There is a popular fiction called the "typical Englishman". Low's

idea of him is different from Poy's, and both are different from a foreign cartoonist's idea. He doesn't really exist, but we all like to imagine him. If we were asked to sketch his portrait, the results would be amusing. To some of us he would be the fox-hunting fellow, to others the cricketer, to others the farmer, to others the sailor, and so on. He would never be the scholar, the don, or the dandy. All of which, of course, is true of the typical Englishman's language, which is the fiction called Standard English, and Standard English is all things to all men. There are even people who believe that the grit and indomitable courage of the race can be expressed vocally only by rolling all the *r*'s.

The passage of time, which is called progress in this age, tends towards a general uniformity of behaviour and environment. Roads, railways, buses, telephones, radio, and the films bring distant countries nearer, and make remote parishes suburbs of Portland Place or of Hollywood. Geographical isolation from the world, or from the neighbourhood, which was responsible for local dialect, is disappearing. Social isolation of one class from another, which gave rise to "class dialect", is breaking down in the social evolution of the State. The final result may be, whether we like it or not, inevitable, but that result is not yet. When we have turned out standard citizens, all on one plan, all of one character and temperament, all educated along the same lines, brought up in standard homes by standard parents, and when we have furnished them all with standardized opportunities for the acquisition of a standardized culture, and the attainment of a standard career, then we shall have a standardized speech, for speech is the reflection of all these things. At the moment we are merely passing through a phase in our social, and consequently linguistic, development,

and it is not surprising that the social aspect of speech looms larger now than it ever did. We are beginning to realize that speech must be regarded as one of the aspects of social behaviour, for that, indeed, is what it is, amongst other things. A man may be known by the company he keeps, the clothes he wears, the sort of house he lives in, the profession he follows, by his table manners, the books he reads, the car, motor-bicycle, or push-bike he runs, the appearance of teeth and finger-nails, by the mass of details in his reaction to social stimuli, in fact. You may learn more from his speech. I find it very comforting, studying the speech game from Portland Place—a splendid research laboratory—to realize that listeners in the country are not angry or full of complaint when a trace of local dialect comes over. As far as my observation goes, a spot, as it were, of Irish, or Scottish, or Welsh, or Lancashire, or even Cockney, doesn't hurt. Sometimes there is a shadow of injustice in our attitude, we have a sentimental affection for a touch of the brogue, or a bit of the Doric, while we are hurt by a trace of Cockney or a soupçon of Lancashire. On the whole however, it is not the *local* discrepancies or incongruities that we resent. We begin to get really vocal only when some social characteristic emerges, when we are in the presence of speech which we imagine to belong to a social class or type of character with which we are not in sympathy. The rolling of *r*'s, for example, doesn't seem to hurt anybody, but *evah*, *pah* (for *power*), make thousands of people angry.

A realization of these facts may bring us to a new point of view, and provide us with new standards of judgment. It may even help us to put speech, and speech education, into a sensible place in the general scheme of things. Our system of education aims at inculcating, among

other things, a high standard of social behaviour, increasing attention is being devoted to this end, citizenship being the key-stone of the arch, so to speak. And it is the aim of the democratic State, it appears, to furnish, as far as possible, equal opportunities for rich and poor alike, making special provision in the case of those who cannot, by private means, acquire the essentials. And so the State teaches the elements of citizenship in its schools, it aims at providing as nearly as possible the type of education that flourishes in the Public Schools. It fosters *esprit de corps*, fair play, respect for authority, a high standard of private and public behaviour, personal hygiene, all of which may be as assiduously cultivated on the asphalt playgrounds of Bethnal Green as on the playing-fields of Eton. If Waterloo was won on the latter, much of the Great War was won on the former.

Of all the aspects of social behaviour, there now remains at any rate one in which equal opportunities are *not* provided for rich and poor alike, and that is speech. Children brought up in homes of good social standing are taught, consciously and unconsciously, a type of speech that will not be a hindrance to them in after life, less fortunate children are often handicapped, and there appears to be no good reason why the State should not take a hand here, and remedy the deficiency. Sentimental speakers who deplore the passing of the country dialects will continue to make moan in after-dinner speeches, but they have a remedy at hand if they care to use it.¹ Let them use their dialect in

¹ "If we think out logically and bravely what is for the good of society, our view of language will lead us to the conclusion that it is our duty to work in the direction which natural evolution has already taken, i.e. towards the diffusion of the common language at the cost of local dialects"—Jespersen, *Mankind Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View*

their public utterance, and send their children to the village schools. And then, when in the fulness of time the children become announcers, the rustic tones of Hogs Norton shall once more echo throughout the land, to the vast improvement of the English language and the general uplift of the English nation. But while these critics continue to talk in accents that even the B B C would hesitate to employ, they had better confine their criticisms to occasions when the Press are not present. This by way of parenthesis, with an apology for the diversion.

Suppose we take a hand in giving the children in our schools the opportunity of acquiring a type of speech that might be less of a hindrance than some existing varieties. Why not use wireless for this purpose? Listen to this record, which gives you the speech of some London Central School boys. There were ninety in all, half of them have since followed a year's wireless lessons in speech, and the other half have not. Next Friday we shall record the voices of the same ninety boys, and see whether there is any difference in the speech of the trained ones. If the new records come from the factory before this course finishes, I will let you hear them, and give you some impressions of the result of this experiment.¹

Let me end with a quotation from Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* —

“ When the revolution comes, Mr Gumbriel the great and necessary revolution, as Alderman Beckford called it, it won't be the owning of a little money that'll get a man into trouble. It'll be his class-habits, Mr Gumbriel, his class-speech, his class-education. It'll be Shibboleth all over again, Mr Gumbriel, mark my words. The Red Guards will stop people in the

¹ See p. 144

street and ask them to say some such word as 'towel' If they call it 'towel', like you and your friends, Mr Gumbriel, why then " Mr Bojanus went through the gestures of pointing a rifle and pulling the trigger he clicked his tongue against his teeth to symbolize the report " That'll be the end of them But if they say 'tèaul', like the rest of us, Mr Gumbriel, it'll be 'Pass Friend, and Long Live the Proletariat' Long live 'tèaul' "

This is a novelist's recognition of the "social behaviour" view of speech It is, of course, fanciful, but in substance it is true to-day, in the reverse sense it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a child who says *tèaul* to pass into the Diplomatic Service Some unfortunates were once put to the sword because their pronunciation of Shibboleth did not come up to the national standard Men have been put to the revolver in Europe in more recent times because they rolled their *r*'s in undesirable ways

We have now advanced so far in our examination of speech in the modern world that we can look more closely into the question of a standard language The purpose of language is to achieve intelligibility, and once this purpose has been fulfilled, language has functioned effectively If, for instance, I look at you, say "Oy!" on a certain intonation, and carry out a gesture with my thumb, the whole act may be taken as meaning that I regard your company as undesirable, and wish you to withdraw If I make the Kaffir *c* click, conventionally written *tut-tut*, several times in response to something you have told me, it may be taken as

meaning that I am surprised at what you tell me, and that my surprise is possibly mingled with regret. We have made our "meaning", whatever meaning is—and that is a long story—perfectly clear by behaving in such a way as to create a disturbance in the surrounding air, and the disturbance is perceived by any normal human within range as sound. We have "spoken", and our speech has been effective, and will continue to be so, so long as the audience is acquainted with the convention. The first act ("Oy!") might not convey to a Chinese listener the same "meaning" as to an English listener, and a Hausa man would probably not react to the click as you and I do. He would use, in like circumstances, a click that we should regard as an undesirable noise to make in company. A system of vocal conventions current among a number of people is a language, and it is clear that there must be a certain uniformity among the conventions, otherwise the purpose of the conventions, i.e. intelligibility, is endangered. Musical notation, as a convention, is successful because it is uniform throughout the world. The convention known as the Roman alphabet is successful because there is a high degree of regularity in the shapes of the individual letters, there are numerous excellent founts of type, and numerous excellent designs of cursive writing, but they must all have sufficient in common to be instantly recognizable. Similarly, every single speaker of a given language must speak it, or try to speak it, in such a way that he is intelligible to those by whom he wishes to be understood. Just as there are some handwritings that are illegible, so there are some "pronunciations"—for so we call the individual manner of performing the spoken language—that are unintelligible, and just as there are hardly any two handwritings that are alike in every

detail, so there are hardly any two pronunciations that are microscopically identical. Here then is the situation: all pronunciations of a given language have something—a great deal—in common, yet no two of them have *all* in common. Is there, then, a standard pronunciation? There *is* a Roman alphabet. Is there a standard handwriting? How *can* there be a standard in things of this kind, where the circumstances are more or less alike? Personality, character, appearance, features, handwriting, dress are all alike in this respect. Each has a great deal in common from individual to individual, yet no two persons are identical in every detail. The possibilities of variation in any one of these characteristics are almost innumerable, and yet there remains the desire, the strong desire, on the part of members of a community to avoid too conspicuous a variation. We aim at producing and reproducing the same type of national character, we dress like the rest of our set, and the masculine kit necessary for Ascot is as much a uniform as a policeman's. Despite the natural differences in our features, we "behave" in this respect as uniformly as possible, and conform to fashions in the matter of length of hair, cut of moustache, and beard, if any. It is always dangerous to work by analogy, and there must be differences between the things enumerated above, and speech. Nevertheless, the more one thinks over the question the more one is driven to the conclusion that there is no more a standard in speech than there is in any of these other things. Still, there does exist in the popular imagination the idea of such a standard, and the idea is shared by scholars who write on language. And if we accept the view that speech *may* be compared with the other aspects of appearance and behaviour that we have suggested, then we shall better understand what standard

speech is. There are many "good-looking" people, male and female, to be seen in the streets every day. We are not all agreed as to their relative or absolute degree of "good-lookingness", a long nose, a big mouth, a squint, is a blemish in the opinion of everybody, and yet there are thousands of people who have no outstanding blemish, who could not be considered "good-looking". Isn't speech rather like this? There are hundreds of varieties that are good, hundreds that have serious blemishes, hundreds that are undistinguished, and hundreds that are almost universally condemned as ugly. The "features" of speech, if we may be allowed to pursue the analogy, however dangerous, are the sounds. Every normal face has a set of features, and every normal speech has a set of sounds, which may be good, bad, or indifferent according to the ideas prevailing at the time, and there is precious little disputing as to taste. A "bad" vowel or diphthong, i.e. one notably at variance with the best prevailing fashionable version, may mar an otherwise excellent "speech appearance", but not sufficiently to make it other than "standard". Half a dozen "bad" vowels or diphthongs will have a disastrous effect. And there are so many other features in speech apart from sounds, there is voice, there are grammar, choice of words, rhythm and intonation, all to be considered. Voice cannot be standard, but we have strong views as to what is good and what is bad. Grammar is standard, apart from minor details, and choice of words is fairly uniform. Rhythm is mainly constant, but intonation will vary from speaker to speaker in detail, while following, in the case of a given language, a very uniform general plan.

This analysis of so-called Standard English is becoming tedious, but it is rather important to understand the

problem It is a common fallacy to imagine that a thing must exist merely because it has a name, and I think we have been deluded into the belief that there is a standard pronunciation on the lines of the standard pint, the standard yard, the standard acceleration due to gravity, or the standard relation between diameter and circumference of the circle There is nothing of the kind

So let us leave it at that Educated people dress more or less alike, look more or less alike, eat more or less alike, and behave, in similar circumstances, more or less alike And they behave vocally more or less alike there is a certain latitude allowed them, but the bounds between good and bad "form", although hard enough to define, are there all the same Which is the conclusion of the whole story, and the man who believes otherwise is not likely to derive much satisfaction out of his philosophy, or much benefit out of his practice There are four announcers in this building at the moment, and no two of them speak alike, if the B B C were to insist on them all being microscopically alike, then the B B C would be very foolish indeed The B B C can, and does, insist on them all coming within the pale, the men have a certain code of speech, just as they have a code of dress and a code of table manners Any extravagances they may tend to acquire are checked, they do not normally eat peas with a knife, and so far none of them has turned up to work in a yellow waistcoat with pink spots Nevertheless, there is a certain variety about their clothing, and less variety about their performance at the table Undue variety in these departments was checked in youth, and they were doubtless often smacked, like the rest of us If they want to talk about "the wahliss orchesträ", or "a sonatar in A", or "the Benk of England", then the B B C tells them that although

they may behave vocally in that manner in the privacy of their homes, just as they may walk about in pyjamas and dressing gown, such speech behaviour is not seemly in the presence of the microphone. And so say all of us !

And now, good-bye to all that ! I want to speak for a minute about a more serious matter, speech and religion, about which I have written recently in *The Listener* ¹ Speech behaviour, like every other aspect of behaviour, changes very markedly when in a religious environment. The dress, the architecture, the art, the music associated with religious life are all different from those associated with secular life, and nowhere is the cleavage more marked than in speech. As a rule, we find that the language used is a fairly antiquated form, in our own country we have the sixteenth-century language, or thereabout, which has endeared itself to all of us, and made of the English Bible one of the great monuments of our literary language. We all feel that it is impossible to be devout in any other style of language, and we resent, rightly or wrongly, all attempts to modernize the Bible. How long is this to go on ? Will it go on until the language of the market-place becomes so far removed from that of the Bible that the Bible becomes, as it tends to become indeed nowadays in some parts of the English-speaking world, unintelligible ? Can it be as irreverent as most of us imagine to put the Lord's Prayer into the English of 1932—even if we could ? Is this authorized version, with its beautiful prose, and its associations so sacred to the English people, capable of translation into the languages of Africa ? These are questions that are going to be of considerable interest

¹ See Chap. VI

in the future, and questions with which the future of Christianity is going to be much concerned

Let us look for a moment at another aspect of the language question in its bearing on religion. There has grown up in this country a form of speech, a pronunciation, associated with public worship, and it is a lamentable fact that this form of speech is frequently ridiculed. The law forbids the public ridicule of every other form of religious behaviour, but religious *speech* behaviour is fair game for every comedian and musical entertainer. The details of this form of speech are perfectly simple to analyse, and you will find them analysed in Chapter VI. I want now merely to tell you of some experiments I have been carrying out to determine precisely the form of speech behaviour that is considered "devout". We have made a series of records of Bible readings by broadcasters who have been found by experience to read the Bible well, by "well" I mean not in the style so frequently ridiculed. I have read a passage in three styles, in order to determine, in a purely experimental fashion, what are the pitches of my voice that are regarded as unsuitable for Bible reading. I have the records here, and you shall hear the effect of (i) reading the Bible as ordinary prose, with the intonations of everyday life, and (ii) cutting out all the high tones, and (iii) a mixture of both.¹

Speech and intonation have much more to do with religion than we imagine, and if, as appears to be the case in this country at the moment, there is in danger of growing up a type of speech behaviour associated with

¹ These records were not published. The comments of an expert committee upon them were instructive. No (i) was felt as lacking in reverence. No (ii) as being sombre in the extreme. No (iii) as tolerable.

public worship that is too much at variance with the speech of everyday life, then there is also the danger that the ridicule directed at the one will leave its mark upon the other

VI

We have devoted five of our six talks on speech in the modern world to our own language in our own country, which is in a way a good thing. But the modern world is a rather strange affair, despite the cynic who is never tired of telling us that there never was a world that was *not* modern in its day. The peculiar feature of this particular modern world is that fundamental ideas in the realm of art, science, politics, religion, and economics have had to be revised very rapidly, and we are becoming aware that inability to revise rapidly enough is having catastrophic consequences. Other broadcasters tell you of the "way of the world", of the vagaries of "this surprising world", of "the wonders of modern science", and as I listen to them I can only feel, more and more strongly, that it is futile to think of language in this surprising world as though language were independent of the surprising world and its surprising inhabitants. To think in 1932 as one thought in 1900 is as foolish in the realm of speech and language as it is in the realms of politics and economics, of art and science. Language used to be the affair of the schoolmaster, the grammarian, and the etymologist, and between them they nearly succeeded in crushing all interest out of the subject. Now we find electrical engineers, physicists, anthropologists, broadcasting corporations, Institutes of Industrial Psychology, civil servants, missionaries and traders, all interested. We have telephones, gramophones, radio, talking films,

and Blattnerphones doing for the spoken word what the printing presses have done for the written word—crystallizing it, broadcasting it, making us familiar with all varieties of it, and highly critical. Printing standardized our spelling and held up all change in orthography, broadcasting may do the same for our pronunciation, which is the “spelling” of speech. If print and radio had been invented at the same time, then all would have been well, for we should have arrested the development of both pronunciation and spelling at the same moment. But as it is, we have a sixteenth-century spelling and a twentieth-century pronunciation, and they don’t fit.

There are other features in this surprising modern world that have repercussions on language. There is, for instance, the growing belief that “nationalism is not enough”, offset by the desire on the part of the newest nations to revive languages that everybody had given up for dead. There is, again, the enormous spread of Western civilization into the East, calling for the creation of new scientific vocabularies in the languages of Asia, and heading for the creation of an international scientific language. And the dangers here are serious, not so much in the realm of natural science, as in the realm of religion, or of politics. New words in a language do not necessarily mean new ideas, and the wholesale importation of Western expressions into Eastern surroundings is quite likely to have odd consequences. An expression like ‘democracy’ is natural to the soil of the West, from which it springs, and in which it has its roots. Transplanted into the East it may grow into something vastly different, and bring forth fruit the like of which has never been seen in the West. But what does this vocabulary *look* like when it gets there? Here are some examples

of recent additions to the vocabulary of Japanese *futoboru* (football), *karushumu* (calcium), *razumu* (radium), *jigitarisu* (digitalis), *horumarin* (formalin), *ekhisu* ("x"), *shiriku hatto* (silk hat), *puratt homu* (platform), *Ru Tan* ('Le Temps'), *zentoruman* (gentleman) By an indescribable accident, 'champion' comes out *champion*, but "roller" and "Laura" both come out *rora*, which is hard on Laura

These examples are taken from Palmer's *Romanization of Japanese* there are plenty of others Spotting the English versions of these words calls for a fine knowledge of the comparative phonetics of English and Japanese

What are we to say of the opening up of Africa, with its hundreds of languages? Can we educate the African without first clearing away some of this linguistic jungle? Out of this welter of languages and dialects there must evolve certain main languages for use over large areas Nothing but nationalism stands to gain by a tower of Babel in the modern world

This modern world is indeed a surprising place, full of surprising things Internationalism will come more readily with an international language Language barriers are as great a hindrance to the interchange of ideas as tariff barriers are to the interchange of goods And the reduction of armaments will follow rapidly on the heels of the reduction in the number of languages

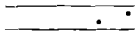


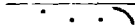
Turn where we will we find, in one way or another, a language question at the root of many of the pressing problems of the day The League of Nations cries aloud for an international language, while some of the smaller nations cry aloud for languages of their own, and Wales for its broadcasting station India is not a nation "because it has no national language" China finds the spread of education handicapped by its ancient written

language, which isolates it from all other nations, and handles Western scientific vocabulary none too easily. Turkey has jettisoned the sacred alphabet of the Moslem world, and come into line with the West. Japan is playing with similar ideas. Cheap printing, cheap typing, telegraphy, transcription of "foreign" words—these are the things upon which the spread of education rests, without these things there is delay, and these things are more easily accomplished in the Roman alphabet than in any other. It is indeed an interesting problem to study, and one in which, although it gives me endless pleasure, I can claim no special authority, but I am going to be bold and make a prophecy that the Roman alphabet will be universal in another two centuries, and that the English language will be very nearly so.

But this is mere speculation. Let us consider facts, for that is the fashion of the age. Here, then, are three facts —

Fact No. 1—The Rockefeller Foundation, in 1932, made a grant of £3,000 per annum for three years to the School of Oriental Studies of the University of London for the encouragement of research into the languages of Africa. If you want to know why, then read Professor Julian Huxley's *Africa View*, and see what conclusions on the language question are arrived at by a trained scientific observer with no special training in language problems. There you will see, for instance, that at any rate one conception necessary to the understanding of the Christian religion cannot be expressed in the language of the Kikuyu, owing to reasons which I cannot explain before the microphone. And you will not be long in agreeing with Professor Huxley when he says that "you cannot be really at home with the inside of people's

minds unless you can think in their own language " Thinking in an African's language is not easy, even when the language happens to be one that has been fairly well investigated Let me give you one example from my own experience, an example which will be clearer over the microphone than it can be on this page In the language of Uganda the words *abana baffe* may mean

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| (a) our children, |  |
| (b) the children are ours, |  |
| (c) are these our children ? |  |
| (d) may the children die, |  |

according to the intonation used ¹ The whole language is riddled with a very complex tonal system, upon which the meaning depends The gospel read in this language by an English missionary with English intonation would probably be little better than mumbo-jumbo to the native congregation We are only just beginning to thrash these tonal systems out, so that we can give our missionaries, teachers, administrators, and anthropologists the key with which to unlock the door into the African's mind That is one of the aspects of speech in the modern world There is enough work in the field of African languages alone to keep us occupied for a generation at least

Fact No 2 —A Swedish business man, a few years ago, came to the conclusion, as a result of his experience in doing business all over the globe, that what the world wants is a universal language, and that the only possible

¹ For a remarkable account of the part played by tones in an African language, see *The Phonetic and Tonal Analysis of Efik*, I C Ward (Heffer, Cambridge)

language for this purpose is English. He spent a good deal of money in the cause, and started branches for the furtherance of his project in Germany and other countries. He is all for English, but all against English spelling, which, in his opinion, as indeed in the opinion of most impartial observers, is one of the greatest hindrances to the spread of the language. So he gathered together, here in London, an international committee to produce a system of simplified spelling that would be acceptable to all the bodies interested in the subject in Great Britain and America, and the result is the system known as *Anglic*, which, based on the foundations laid by Professor Zachrisson, of Uppsala, is what English spelling will probably be when the English-speaking world decides that the moment has come for spelling reform. In the spring of 1932 I went to Stockholm to see the system being used in some of the schools where English is taught. Children learn to pronounce English, and to read it correctly, from this simplified spelling, which is perfectly regular, and not too much unlike the traditional spelling to make transition from one to the other difficult.

Spelling reform is always a thorny subject, for the existing spelling is so sanctified by long usage as to be regarded as sacred. We are all built that way and that is the end of the matter. We hate new spellings, and hate any disturbance of the printed page. 'Correct' spelling has become synonymous with education, and reformed spelling will consequently look uneducated. If we could only bear it for a few years we should get used to it, it would look as good as the other, and our youngsters would have one burden less to bear in their early years.

Fact No 3—An Englishman, C. K. Ogden, of Magdalene College, Cambridge, is also persuaded that

English can very well serve as the International language of the future, and he has worked for ten years at finding out precisely how many words are necessary for the expression in English of all but purely technical ideas. With a vocabulary of 850 words, to which are added universal words like "radio", "hotel", etc., he is able to handle most of the things that people need to say in everyday life. A modern German novel, translated into this vocabulary, reads uncommonly well, gaining, indeed, some subtle literary quality from the simplification of its language. Scientific literature can be equally well handled, but provision has to be made for the special vocabulary necessary for every science, fifty extra words being allotted to each science. Conversation carried on in this vocabulary sounds perfectly good, as anyone may judge from the gramophone record which my wife and I have made for Mr. Ogden to illustrate the adaptability of this medium to conversation. Like everything else that is new, this Basic English, as it is called, has its critics, but it is nevertheless a linguistic experiment of the first order, and has attracted very considerable attention from all quarters of the globe. A series of half-crown booklets dealing with Basic English is published by Messrs. Kegan Paul, and any or all of them will well repay study. If you imagine them to be dry you are mistaken, for Mr. Ogden has, amongst other gifts, the brightest of bright styles, and if you still believe that language is a dull subject, then these talks have been in vain.

So much for facts, and if other facts are needed, here is another, in the shape of a booklet from Geneva, called *Language in International Relations*,¹ in which will be

¹ *Die Sprache im internationalen Verkehr*, Dr. E. Ritter, Divisions Chef im Internationalen Arbeitsamt Geneva 1932

found an abundance of statistics dealing with the languages of the world, and the numbers of people using them. On the last page of this booklet is expressed the view that English is the only possible language with any claims to international usage.

Whether we like it or not, our present and our future are very largely wrapped up in language, and the irate correspondent who abused me a fortnight ago because I *would* drag what he called class prejudice into a discussion on Standard English will be equally irate with me this week because I will drag internationalism, etc., into a talk on 'Speech To-day and To-morrow'. Still, he is an unintelligent fellow whose brain is in watertight compartments, for the bulkheads in these brains are hermetically sealed. Let us get this home.

What we see and how we see it is largely determined by the language in whose traditions we have been brought up.¹

Now what about this speech of to-morrow? It is quite evident that the English language is going to play a great part in the future of the world, and it is equally evident that there will grow up in the world, in India, in China, in America, and in Africa, dialects of English that will give many a narrow-minded Britisher pangs of anguish as he hears them. Let us all take heart of grace, and let me repeat here what I said in *The Radio Times* in 1931: "For a nation that does not shine over much in speaking foreign languages, we are a little fastidious in our attitude to speech in general and the foreign word in particular, we attach far too much social significance to false quantities, mispronunciations, and local accents. Speech was designed to convey intelligence, and not to be a social

¹ See *Word Economy* M. L. Lockhart. Megan Paul.

criterion " There is only one criterion to apply to the English of to-morrow, only one standard by which the educated speech of to-morrow must be judged, and that is universal intelligibility Any dialect, i.e. large dialect such as Indian English or African English, must be submitted to one test it must be understood by all the English-speaking world There will be strange sounds, strange rhythms, and fantastic intonations to be heard in the outlying parts of the world, but so long as the people who use them are understood by the rest, then all will be well There will have to be intelligent guidance, British and American radio stations will maintain some standard performance of the English language, so that all may strive in one direction The gentlemen of Lagos may never acquire the Oxford accent, and the gentlemen of Calcutta may be a trifle halting in their rhythms, but so long as they understand one another, and so long as the home-brewed version of English is not entirely foreign to them, all will be well

The first step is to persuade ourselves that just because a man happens to speak a different brand of English from our own, he is not (a) an oaf, (b) an inferior person, (c) a conceited donkey, (d) unfit to preside over an international conference, (e) a radio announcer

And now may I, in conclusion, thank you for having listened so patiently, and applauded so heartily with your letters and post cards, while I have ambled along on what is, after all, not everybody's hobby horse The study of Phonetics is not a dull study, despite the fact that many dull books have been written about it I know of no subject that can be handled so inadequately in print, and none that so well repays the sort of treatment that, by courtesy of the B B C, I have been able to give it in these talks It is the aim of every university teacher

—which is what I am—to promote interest in his subject, to neglect no opportunity of arousing enthusiasm, of preaching his gospel from whatever pulpit, even the columns of the popular Press. And therefore my last word is one of thanks to the B B C for giving me the freedom of *their* pulpit

CHAPTER IV

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD TO-DAY

*A public lecture given at University College, London,
in January, 1933*

“ There can be no better conditions for the formation of colloquial speech than a society in which the graces and lightness of the courtier are united to the good taste and sound knowledge of the scholar. From such a circle we might expect a mode of speech as far removed from the mere frivolities of fashion, the careless and half-incoherent babble of the fop, as from the tedious preciousness of the pedant, or the lumbering and uncouth utterance of the boor ”—*H C K Wyld*

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD TO-DAY

If, as some people allege, it is an open question whether it is a privilege or a misfortune to live at all, the question is certainly more open to discussion when applied to living during the present century. Modern science appears to have done little more than confirm the traditional solution to the question—that it all depends upon the liver. There is much to be said on both sides, and there are many to say it. Whatever we may think of our generation, we may, I think, say this of it, that it has not lacked excitement or adventure. Never since the Renaissance has so much of the lumber that passed for wisdom and knowledge and conviction been so rudely shaken up and cast aside. Never have so many fundamental ideas had to be revised, in the realms of art, of science, of politics, of economics, of religion. Look where you will, all the signs point in one direction. Nobody knows what they are pointing to, or where we are making for, but the signs point forward, and we are all in the stampede. The ethics of stampede are simple, as any gold rush proves: the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong. From which we may draw the moral: those nations or individuals that lag behind in this race to new heavens and new worlds, new religions, new philosophies, new psychologies, new outlooks on international and national relations, new theories of nature and of life and education, will suffer, and doubtless in this case deserve, their fate. The future is with them that endure to the end.

What are we, who are interested in language, to think

about all this ? How far is language, of itself, concerned in these doings ? How can we take part in the universal readjustment ? What was there in the attitude of our predecessors to speech and language that called for readjustment ? Can the intelligent man of to-day think of speech and language as his father did ? And lastly, which of us dare say that language is no concern of his ? We may be, as Prospero said, such stuff as dreams are made on, but our thoughts, our beliefs, our ideals, and our aspirations are such stuff as words are made on. We live bodily in an atmosphere of gas, and mentally in an atmosphere of words, and I am not the first to point to the analogy between words and gas. But it has perhaps escaped notice that the mental atmosphere, like the physical, supports and encourages life only when it is fresh. When stale with over-use it is noxious or narcotic, and many commit mental suicide by putting their heads in such gas ovens as the cheaper Press, clubs, and university lecture rooms. Even when the dose is not fatal, its after effects are often permanent, and many a politician has walked about in a state of complete hypnosis ever since he was gassed when Gladstone said whatever he did in 1884, or 5, or 6. Still, as a narcotic, it has its uses. Under its soothing influence poets, novelists, dramatists, philosophers, politicians, historians, and critics move blissfully in a phantom world of their own creation, while the other world rolls on with little regard to the niceties of literary style, or the limitations of vocabulary in this language or that.

The nature of the animal and vegetable world is largely determined by the composition of the atmosphere in which this life is lived. It is the function of the chemist to investigate the nature of this atmosphere, just as it is the function of the biologist, the bio-chemist, and others

to investigate its determinative influences upon the nature of animal and vegetable life. Whose function is it to investigate the nature of the language atmosphere, and who knows how our creeds and our philosophies are determined by the nature of the particular language atmosphere in which our minds live, and move, and have their being?

We have pursued the analogy far enough, but there is still sport left for those who delight in the chase. The intrepid, however, should be warned lest they stray too far, and like those medieval huntsmen, find themselves in the magic woods of prose and verse, to be for ever spellbound by the Muses, never more to see reality but through the blue mists of romantic verbalism.

In the realm of language, as in other branches of knowledge, fundamental notions have had to be revised, and we find psychologists, electrical engineers, physicists, judges, anthropologists, and broadcasting corporations, surveying and staking out their claims on ground where once the grammarian, the philologist, and the elocutionist scratched the surface in the days of our youth. Even Cabinet Ministers take a hand, and Postmasters-General exhort the public to trill their *r*'s, make long *x*'s, pronounce *five* as *fife*, and behave generally as though their native language was a mixture of Balliol, Bala, and Berlin. Good luck to them all in their digging! They will throw up much rubbish, and disturb the once pleasant and placid landscape, but they will find much pure gold.

No inventions have done more to bring about the new world than those which have to do with the transmission and preservation of the spoken word, and University College, London, may well remember with pride that two of its members have contributed in no uncertain measure

to the advancement of scientific achievement in this direction Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, the phonograph, and the photophone, was educated at this College, where his father, Alexander Melville Bell, the distinguished phonetician, taught before he went to Canada in 1870 Sir John Ambrose Fleming's application of electrical science to the transmission of speech is known to all of you, his name will ever be held in the highest esteem in this college, where he was for many years Professor of Electrical Engineering It is largely due to the labours of these men that the spoken word is now, for the first time in the history of man, relatively independent of terrestrial time and space

Philosopher and psychologist are more concerned with language now than ever, and bid fair to oust the grammarian and the philologist Their advent into the field of linguistic studies is likely to revolutionize many of our ideas Glance at the remarkable series of quotations that stand at the forefront of Mr Ogden's *Meaning of Meaning* Listen to Jeremy Bentham saying that "Error is never so difficult to be destroyed as when it has its roots in language" And would it not be a good thing to present to every delegate to the League of Nations this quotation from Professor J S Mackenzie ?—"An Englishman, a Frenchman, a German, and an Italian cannot by any means bring themselves to think quite alike, at least on subjects that involve any depth of sentiment, they have not the verbal means" And if this is true of the Englishman, the Frenchman, the German, and the Italian, who share the same culture, and whose linguistic material is of common origin, how much more true must it be of the millions of Asia and Africa, with whom we have nothing linguistic or cultural in common ?

It did not take a trained observer like Professor Julian Huxley long to come across the language question. Turn up the heading "Language Problems" in *Africa View*, and see, for instance, why it is that at least one idea essential to an orthodox conception of Christianity is impossible of expression in the Kikuyu language, because of a vital difference in social habits. Professor Huxley sums it up thus: "It illustrates the difficulty inherent in language and its limitations—the difficulty of making sure, when you try to express one of your Western ideas, that you are not making it mean something quite different to your hearers. You cannot be really at home with the inside of people's minds unless you can think in their language."

Words have their roots in cultures, and acquire rich emotional accretions in their growth through the ages. They can seldom be transplanted from one culture to another unless the soil has been carefully prepared to receive them—and even then success may be doubtful. We are all apt to forget this simple fact, and so bring trouble upon our heads. To imagine that two words like "democratic government", which have two thousand years of Western culture behind them, will blossom and bud when transplanted into the East, is as costly a mistake as it is possible to imagine.

One of the most remarkable features of the world of to-day is the increasing interdependence of the great nations upon one another, economically, politically, and culturally. However separate the nations are linguistically, they are united in their efforts to cope with the grave international problems that seem to be beyond the realm of human control. No barriers to international understanding are as serious as those of language, and yet we are presented with the paradoxical situation of

new nationalities insisting on restoring languages that had very much better be left to perish. The world needs many more dead languages, if for no other reason than to keep our philologists innocently busy.

But more than all it needs an international language, and it is high time that as a nation we faced our responsibilities in this matter, for ours is the language of greatest international currency. The English language in one form or another is destined to play a great part in Africa and Asia, because it is the medium through which our Western civilization is spreading. The technical and scientific vocabulary of Asia and Africa will be drawn mainly from English.

It is, however, always a little difficult to discuss this subject without arousing prejudice. On the international language question, we have two schools of thought:

(i) those who advocate an artificial language, (ii) those who favour an existing language. Of the former, the Esperantists have made most progress, and their venture is a linguistic and social experiment of the highest interest. Disciples of this school are embarrassed by three facts:

- (i) New languages are invented almost daily which, if they do not attain international currency, are at any rate useful for purposes of soliloquy!
- (ii) The grammatical structure of the existing artificial languages is possibly too complex for use in Africa and in the East.
- (iii) There is no incentive to study the languages.

The chief objection to the use of an existing national language has been the fear that the favoured nation might reap considerable political advantage. But the League of Nations, and the countless international conferences of the last ten years have taught us that the affairs of the world can be adequately handled only if the

languages are restricted to English, French, German, and Italian Here is an item of news from *The Daily Telegraph* for 22nd November, 1932 —

SPEECHES IN ENGLISH

Geneva, Monday

A noteworthy feature of to-day's remarkable duel between the Japanese and Chinese representatives was the fact that both spoke English, and both are graduates of American Universities—Dr Matsuoka from Oregon, and Dr Wellington Koo from Pennsylvania and Columbia

They are old friends, and their speeches were studiously courteous and dignified —*Reuter*

Had these delegates used their own language, their speeches might possibly not have been so studiously courteous and dignified It is difficult to be rude in a foreign language And not only did they do it in Geneva, they have since done it in half the cinemas of the world Our English speech is a very familiar fact in the world of to-day, and it is time our Universities became aware of that fact, and adjusted their ideas on the subject of English teaching accordingly It is doubtless a useful thing to know the rhythmical structure of English verse ancient or modern, and the details of Old English syntax, but what the Japanese and Chinese want to know is the rhythm of modern colloquial English, upon which, probably more than upon any other factor, intelligibility depends

Two experiments in the realm of International Linguistics may be of interest as illustrating the spread of English There has grown up in recent years in Sweden a movement that has for its object the encouragement of the use of English as the auxiliary international language It has, of course, become obvious that the

world will not trouble to learn the languages of the small nations, and so the small nations must learn the languages of the large nations with whom they do business. If trade follows the flag, then language follows trade. But our Swedish friends will have none of our spelling, which they, in common with most intelligent people, regard as a serious obstacle to the widespread use of English. Our language, which has been compared by foreign scholars with Chinese in respect of the simplicity of its grammatical structure, preserves an antiquated spelling system that is the despair of our young—and old, and is the laughing-stock of the world. A conference of English, American, and Swedish phoneticians worked out an agreed system of reformed spelling acceptable to all three nationalities. It is a simple and logical system, which may achieve immortality if we can ever as a nation take our courage in two hands and do something about it. Children in Swedish schools, chauffeurs in the towns, guards on the trains, have learnt English by means of this simplified spelling, some day perhaps our own children will do likewise. We modernize our heating, lighting, drainage systems, transport, and all means of communication, except the written word. But thanks to the ceaseless efforts of our own Simplified Spelling Society, and to the indomitable energy of Sir George Hunter, there is hope that this much needed reform may soon be achieved. "To spell words as they *used* to be pronounced," said Skeat, "was not etymological but antiquarian." A phonetic spelling would do much to steady the English language in this tempestuous stage in its history, spoken as it now is by hundreds of millions all over the world. It is, of course, possible that the language will not survive, and that some future Gibbon, reviewing the Decline and Fall of Empires, may have to

record as one of the major tragedies of history, the shipwreck of the historic English language

The second experiment is a purely English one, and has for its purpose the reduction of the essential vocabulary, adequate for most purposes, to its absolute minimum. Many attempts, based upon counting frequencies, have been made to find out the commonest words in English, and to use the thousand or so words of most frequent occurrence as the basis of teaching the language. The new experiment, called Basic English, devised by Mr C K Ogden after some ten years of research, moves on other lines. Mr Ogden set out to find the smallest number of words that, excluding, of course, pure technicalities, would suffice for the expression of most ideas in intelligible English. Let me commend to all of you this experiment, and let me ask you to try the effect of reading literature in which the whole vocabulary employed is 850 words, with the addition of some words of international usage, such as "radio", "hotel". As an international means of communication, Basic has great possibilities, and it is gratifying to note that it is making rapid strides in the East. The spread of Western civilization and Western knowledge into the East and Africa is going to raise important questions of vocabulary, and the English language is destined to play a great part in the intellectual life of these continents.

Let us glance for a moment at speech and language in their bearing upon religion. In all times and in all ages, as far as we are aware, the public performance of religious worship is associated with departures from everyday behaviour. We are familiar with the distinction between religious and secular art, architecture, music, dress, and literature. There is also a marked distinction between religious and secular speech and language. As a rule, the

language associated with religion is an antiquated form of the vernacular. We in this country feel that real devoutness must be associated with sixteenth-century English. Is devotion possible in the language of to-day? If not, how are we to render the scriptures into the languages of Asia and Africa? Try as an experiment translating the opening sentences of the Lord's Prayer into 1932 English. An interesting example of the modern religious language of an inferior culture is to be found in the language of the negro spirituals. "I've got shoes, you've got shoes," in a state of society where the possession of shoes is as legitimate an aspiration as a mansion in the skies, is the height of devoutness, in a different vocabulary and a modern syntax. It might be an educative experiment to translate the Bible into some such simplified vocabulary as Basic English, and use the simplified version as the basis for the translation into the languages of Africa and the East.

On the speech side, there is a marked difference between the secular and the religious, it is felt that the intonations of the market-place are as much out of place in the temple as the other features of everyday life. The speech behaviour frequently associated with religious worship in this country has been much criticized of late, what is called the clerical accent is frequently the object of ridicule because it is felt to be too great a departure, in this enlightened age, from the normal speech behaviour. The B B C, in collaboration with the Linguaphone Institute, has recently made a series of gramophone records in which the attempt has been made to read the Bible devoutly, while at the same time avoiding the traditional style.¹

¹ For a fuller account see Chap. VI

Professor MacMurray has reminded us¹ that we cannot be scientific about anything until we can think about it without emotional excitement. Speech is, like Bolshevism and the Leg Theory, a subject upon which very few of us can think calmly. Most of us think of society as being divided into two parts—those who by the grace of God talk the King's English and those who do not. And it is usually regarded as sacrilege to interfere with this divinely ordained dichotomy. At the root of this attitude is what Anatole France called that species of comfortable silliness known as snobbishness, and sentimental politicians, when there is nothing else to talk about, deplore the passing of our country dialects. They blame the B B C—that sprawling Colossus—for crushing out the life-blood of our dialects, forgetting that their social legislation, all aimed at raising the standard of living, is probably a major factor. You cannot raise social standards without raising the speech standard, and since speech has come to be regarded as an aspect of social behaviour, it must be treated as such. The aim of education is to bring about a high standard of social behaviour, and if the purpose of education in the modern democratic State is to furnish equal opportunities for rich and poor alike, then speech education must be handled intelligently, and not left to chance. It is only within the last few years that we have seriously attempted to handle this question, to set about teaching the elements of good speech behaviour in the primary schools of the country. The work is handicapped because Universities and Training Colleges do very little to equip our teachers for this task. Broadcast lessons on the elements of English Phonetics have been given for some years, aimed specifically at improving the standard of speech in the

¹ *B B C Talks Handbook*, 1932

primary schools ~ Throughout the course of the year 1932-33 an interesting experiment, made possible by the generosity of the Linguaphone Institute, was carried out under the direction of the Central Council for School Broadcasting. The purpose of the experiment was to ascertain whether broadcast lessons on speech had any effect upon the children who listened to them. Ninety boys in their first year at the Southwark Central School were divided into two carefully equated classes, and gramophone records were made of the pronunciation of every boy. During the school year, one group took the wireless lesson, which was followed up by the teacher, while the other group took their ordinary lesson. At the end of the year the ninety boys were again recorded. The records were handed over to an independent expert for detailed examination—a very long and careful process during which the investigator had at his disposal the remarkable technical equipment of the B B C. His results were analysed by a group of psychological and statistical experts, led by Professor Cyril Burt, and checked in every possible way. The result is briefly this, that whereas all the boys showed definite improvement, the improvement of the Wireless Class was nearly twice as great as that of the Control Class. The report of this experiment is an interesting document, and the records of London speech will be of great interest to future historians of our language.¹

So far the question has not been faced in the secondary and public schools, nor in the Universities. It is a sad and significant commentary upon the apathy of the Universities that the only definite association of the name of a University with speech should be one of contempt

¹ Inquiry Pamphlet No. 3, *The Evidence regarding Broadcast Speech Training*, price 6d

Whether the "Oxford accent" is a product of Oxford is a matter of doubt, but there can be no doubt at all about the general contempt in which this variety of jargon is held. In itself it is harmless, and our dislike is not based on æsthetic grounds. We despise it as we despise most things that are felt to be the silly affectations of a class with which we are not in sympathy.

Here are two letters that bear directly on this point, from the Principal of one of our foremost institutions devoted to business training—himself an Oxford scholar of distinction in more fields than the purely academic.

"I wonder whether you could help me by recommending someone to teach young undergraduates to talk convincing and acceptable English. We run a Course, of which I enclose particulars, and we realize that efficient talking is most important to the would-be business man and particularly to the would-be manager.

It is a case for recommending them as private students to someone who will do them good by removing the Oxford accent or any other faults and by developing some constructive improvements. I should be very glad indeed if you could give me one or possibly two names."

Here is a further comment in his reply to my letter recommending a phonetician who had the necessary tact.

"I quite agree that the right man is difficult to come by. However, the standard of speaking is universally so exceptionally low (judging by my experience of those who have come to be interviewed for appointments) that I believe that any attention devoted to a subject which is wholly neglected is bound to be to the good."

And this concern with matters of speech is no new idea: the academic fashion was as unpopular in Puttenham's day as it is in our own, and the author of the *Art of English Poesie* might well have been speaking to-day instead of in 1589 —

Of Language. This part, in our poet, must be heedily looked into that it be natural, pure and the most usual of all his country rather than which is spoken in the King's Court, or in the good towns and cities within the land, than in the marches and frontiers, or in port towns, where strangers haunt for traffic sake, or yet in universities, where scholars use much peevish affectation of words out of the primitive languages

Neither shall he take the terms of northern men such as they use in daily talk, whether they be noblemen or gentlemen, or of their best clerks, all is a matter

Ye shall therefore take the usual speech of the court, and that of London, and the shires lying about London within sixty miles, and not much above

I say not this but that in every shire of England there be gentlemen and others that speak, but specially write, as good southern as we of Middlesex and Surrey do, but not the common people of every shire, to whom the gentlemen and also their learned clerks do for the most part condescend

Finally, may we say a word about the question of speech as it concerns the B B C, which is, of course, the largest purveyor of the spoken word

Since the invention of printing, which broadcast the visual word, there has been no such revolution as the invention of radio, which broadcasts the spoken word. For centuries we have lain under the tyranny of the printed word, which we worship and venerate and study to the complete exclusion of the spoken word. Our language education has centred around the written word, and the technique of the visual language—the *writing* of prose and verse—has absorbed the whole of our attention. But now speech has come into its own again, and many of us have had to learn that before a microphone, with a possible audience of millions, writing is not enough. The technique necessary for the presentation of ideas and facts in speech is very different from that required for

writing—and ten years of broadcasting have made us all very critical of this technique. Successful broadcast speakers are those who, consciously or unconsciously, recognize two things, (i) that speech and print have nothing in common, and (ii) that oratory, whether religious, political, or dramatic, is dead.

There are a hundred aspects of Broadcast English that we might discuss, but there is time for one only—those much criticized public servants the announcers. Barracking announcers is a popular pastime, but it is dying out. Let us begin our observations on the announcers by boldly stating two facts which are incontrovertible —

- (i) Everybody believes he could do the announcer's job better than the announcer himself
- (ii) There is no man or woman alive capable of doing the announcer's job for three months without coming to grief

If you can pronounce "accurately" every word that appears in the current number of *The Radio Times*, read a news bulletin full of Japanese, Chinese, Bolivian, Indian, Portuguese, Persian, French, and German names without turning a hair, give an SOS in French that has a remote chance of being recognized as French in places where French is spoken, and whip up an interest in Icelandic depressions, if you can speak a variety of King's English while you console a fainting soprano and restrain a pompous professor, not only are you, since the quotation is now inevitable, a man, my son, but you may some day be an announcer. But you can't do these things to the satisfaction of everybody. There is always a somebody ready to write to you on club note-paper to tell you that Gandhi's name has a *long* vowel, and a somebody ready to tell you that any Tom, Dick, or

Harry ought to know that Gandhi's name has a *short* vowel

We have in the course of this lecture heard the views of one sixteenth-century writer upon the speech affected by scholars in his day Thomas Wilson, another writer of the same period, is even more violent than Puttenham in his dislike of the academic mannerisms of his day, had he been living at this hour I should warmly have recommended him to step into my shoes and be linguistic adviser to the British Broadcasting Corporation "Among all other lessons this should first be learned," he says, "that we never affect any strange inkhorn terms, but so speak as is commonly received, neither seeking to be over fine, nor yet living over careless, using our speech as most men do, and ordering our wits as the fewest have done Some seek so far for outlandish English that they forget altogether their mother's language And I dare swear this, if some of their mothers were alive, they were not able to tell what they say, and yet these fine English clerks will say, they speak in their mother tongue if a man should charge them for counterfeiting the King's English Some far journeyed gentlemen, at their return home, like as they love to go in foreign apparel, so they will powder their talk with oversea language He that cometh lately out of France will talk French English and never blush at the matter I know them that think Rhetoric to stand wholly upon dark words, and he that can catch an inkhorn term by the tail, him they count to be a fine Englishman "

I have made some animadversions in the course of this lecture upon the attitude of our Universities to the question of speech I have given you the views of one engaged in training graduates for business May I give

you finally some conclusions that the B B C has arrived at as the result of some ten years' experience in looking for suitable purveyors of our spoken language and the languages of our neighbours

(i) The present version of the English language as spoken by many young university graduates and undergraduates is not particularly suitable for the purpose of broadcasting. It may be admirable in Chelsea or Bloomsbury or on the West End stage, but it offends the rest of the English-speaking world

(ii) Academic and pedantic speech, however suitable for the precincts of Cathedrals and Universities, is equally unsuitable for broadcasting. It is generally regarded as indicative of a type of mind out of touch with the actualities of modern life

(iii) However excellent our schools and colleges are in teaching the technique of written language, they are not yet fully awake to their responsibilities in the realm of the spoken language

(iv) Young men who have taken degrees in Modern Languages are often unable to read an S O S in French satisfactorily, or to introduce a programme of French, Italian, or German music

(v) Those of us who are tempted to indulge in the game of baiting the announcer, might do well to remember that they are criticizing some very representative products of our age

Here, then, is a subject—speech and language in their bearing upon life. It is one of the most fascinating of all human studies. Proper understanding of the relation between word and thought, of the limitation of one language as compared with another, of the proper relation existing between spoken and written words, is essential. Religious and political thought are certainly

swayed and possibly determined by language words have become, like coins, tokens that we use with little reference to their actual values, and with inadequate understanding of the sanctions upon which their efficacy depends. They have become, in many instances, ends in themselves, instead of being means to an end.

“ ‘ Heredity ’ is an example of a common type of human behaviour in respect of the use of words. We give to an observed phenomenon a name for purely descriptive purposes. In due time this word takes on an unexpressed but none the less definite connotation of explanation ”
(*Constitution and Health*, Raymond Pearl)

A verbal currency that is not backed with solid understanding leads to mental bankruptcy. We are passing through anxious times, and never was there a time in the history of Western European civilization when it was more necessary to understand all that speech and language mean, and all that they do not mean.

CHAPTER V
STANDARDS IN SPEECH

*A paper read before the Philological Society of Great
Britain in December, 1932*

“ Upon another occasion I talked to him on this subject, having myself taken some pains to improve my pronunciation Johnson said to me, ‘ Sir, your pronunciation is not offensive ’ ”—BOSWELL

STANDARDS IN SPEECH

Some ten years of association with the practical phonetic problems involved in the broadcasting of the English language have not been without their effect upon one who, previous to this experience, had accepted the views on Standard English that were current in the first quarter of this century

Scholars were familiar with the expression Standard English long before the advent of broadcasting, but the expression has now become a byword in the daily Press, which when it is not complaining that the announcers do not speak Standard English, is accusing the British Broadcasting Company of the offence of standardizing our language. Possibly the time has come when we might examine the expression in the light of recent experience, and see what precisely it means, if indeed it means anything

Let us begin by reviewing some of the definitions that have been given —

In 1907 Sweet said, "Standard English, like Standard French, is now a class dialect more than a local dialect; it is the language of the educated all over Great Britain," and further on, "A standard spoken language is, strictly speaking, an abstraction"

Wyld, in 1907, said, "What usually happens is that the critic of language has in his mind a vague picture of an ideal standard of language, probably based on his own vague notion of the way he speaks himself and he proceeds to test all other modes of speech by this standard," and again, "There is a form of English which enjoys a prestige and a place in the general estimation that nothing can

alter This form of English is essentially a class dialect it is independent or largely independent of locality It is the form of English which obtains, with an astonishing degree of uniformity, among the upper and middle classes of this country "

In 1919 Wyld said, " Received Standard is a Class Dialect " Jones says of it that it is that generally used by those who have been educated at preparatory boarding schools and public schools, and has the merit of being very widely understood Speaking of the pronunciation of English in Scotland, Grant says in 1914, " The standard adopted in this book is the speech of the educated middle classes in Scotland it is the language of our Universities, of the pulpit, platform, and the school '

From recent American writers we may quote Krapp (1919) saying, " Geographical distinctions are not of prime importance in the discussion of standard American speech What I call standard may perhaps best be defined negatively, as the speech which is least likely to attract attention to itself as being peculiar to any class or locality "—a startling variation from the others, and apparently a complete negation of what we may call the " class prerogative " type of definition

If we exclude Krapp's definition, we may sum up all the others by saying that Standard, or Received (call it what you will), is what educated English people speak This is as useful a definition as one which would define the yardstick as being the measure used by honest drapers in London for measuring cloth As far as it goes it is a good definition, but it is clear that the yardstick must have other purposes than that of serving as the hall-mark of honesty in the land of drapers, and must rest upon sanctions less liable to variation consequent upon fluctuations in the prosperity of draperdom Just as this

definition really rests upon the honest draper, so the others rest upon what we mean by an educated man, and ideas on this subject are varied. One of the B B C announcers, educated at a public school and the University of Oxford, was recently severely criticized for his pronunciation of English by one of the very distinguished scholars from whose work I have just quoted. Indeed all the announcers (1932) were educated at public schools and Universities, and as far as I am aware, not one of them escapes criticism, though some deserve it more than others.

The question of defining Standard Pronunciation (since we must confine ourselves to the pronunciation aspect of Standard English) is evidently not quite so easily solved as one imagines, and possibly the time has arrived when we may remove the question from the realm of academic discussion, and relate it to practical affairs. It is to me a very practical matter, for I have to select from numbers of young men, mostly educated at public schools and universities, those who in my opinion have a pronunciation that will not arouse too much adverse criticism in the country. At least fifty candidates, all University men, are rejected for every one accepted, and the only conclusion I am driven to is that either the public schools and Universities do not talk "Standard" English, or that what they do talk is unsuitable for broadcasting. What is probably a more legitimate conclusion to draw from these premises is that current conceptions of "Standard" as applied to pronunciation are very confused and ill defined, and that most people have too clearly in their minds the idea of a scientific standard, with perhaps an inadequate understanding of the nature of most so-called scientific standards.

In any event this essay may be considered as an introduction to the large question of Standards in Speech

In the realm of Science, standardization has been defined as the setting up of standards by which extent, quantity, value, performance, and service may be gauged. Instances quoted are the mile, hour, pound, bushel, and dollar

It is quite clear that speech standards cannot be compared with scientific standards, although they have more in common than at first appears

What I am going to suggest in the course of this essay is that there are many standards operative, and that the conception of a Standard English or a Standard Pronunciation is in reality a very complicated idea

The first standard required of all speech is that of Intelligibility. Whether communication is or is not the first function of speech is of little importance, but it certainly is *a* function and an important one, and over-indulgence in soliloquy is usually regarded as a symptom of imbecility

Unless speech is intelligible, it fails, and all pronunciation, i.e. all performance of the spoken language, must come up to this standard. It must be intelligible in the community for which it is intended. Local dialects all come up to this standard in their own environment. The more widely intelligible a pronunciation is, the more suitable it is for use outside a purely local environment. I have attempted from time to time, both in the lecture room and over the radio, to determine the factors upon which Intelligibility depends, this is a piece of linguistic research that should be carried out scientifically because it is evidently needed by the designers of microphones, telephones, etc. A telephone that fails to transmit speech up to the Intelligibility standard is not efficient,

and it must be confessed that much of the apparatus in use in the mechanical and electrical recording and transmitting of speech is only barely efficient

I have suggested as a suitable but rather lengthy name for this standard the Acoustic Minimum necessary for Intelligibility, and believe it to be composed in part of the Sounds, the Rhythm, and the Intonation of the language under consideration. Sounds are not as important in Intelligibility as we are inclined to imagine. The substitution of a lisp for the sound of *s* does not interfere in the slightest. The modern London telephone cannot distinguish between *vee* and *thee*, and it has other limitations which we need not refer to now. It must of course be realized that the most important factor in Intelligibility is context, but provided the context is beyond doubt we are left with this conclusion. Intelligibility may be achieved even though the speaker or the apparatus falls short in the matter of some of the sounds. Assuming slow deliberate reading to provide 100 per cent of the sounds, it would be an interesting investigation to see what percentage could be dispensed with in rapid conversation without affecting Intelligibility.

Rhythm, as far as my observation goes, is a critical factor in Intelligibility, and inability to reproduce English rhythm is one of the most frequent causes why foreigners are misunderstood. During my investigation of this question of Intelligibility, when engaged in collaboration with the National Institute of Industrial Psychology in designing a system of testing the acuity of hearing of prospective telephone operators, I spent an afternoon at a London Telephone Exchange and sat for nearly an hour listening to the incoming calls dealt with by the operator alongside me. A frequent cause of error was similarity in rhythm of two exchange names.

Intonation enters largely into Intelligibility but in a way that cannot be discussed now. The Intonation pattern is as essential to Intelligibility as the Rhythm.

If we accept, for a moment, this idea of a Standard of Intelligibility, then obviously the speech or pronunciation that best comes up to this Standard is the one that is most readily understood by the largest number of people.

Let us discuss one example of failure to realize the operation of this Standard of Intelligibility. Those who imagine themselves to be the custodians of the purity of our language often assail the phoneticians for their treatment of the English neutral vowel, maintaining that these unstressed vowels ought to preserve some trace of their stressed quality.

We all know what the vowel in *man* sounds like, and that it is different in the mouth of the same speaker from the vowel he uses in *men*. But what the vowel in *man* is in *postman* is a very different affair, and is *postman* in any way different from *postmen*? Whatever we should like to think, it is certain that the precise quality of the unstressed vowel in *postman* is immaterial to Intelligibility. The shade of vowel used in the singular may or may not be perceptibly different from that used in the plural, but distinction is quite unnecessary as a rule, for the context determines whether the singular or plural form is intended. If dispute arises as to which form is meant, then recourse is had to a stressed version, e.g. I said *post-mán* not *post-mén*.

Further, it is doubtful whether it would be possible to use in the unstressed syllable a vowel of the stressed quality without seriously interfering with the rhythm. The effect upon rhythm of the use of stressed vowel forms in what to us are unstressed syllables can best be examined in certain types of American pronunciation.

Here again difference of rhythm is a frequent source of misunderstanding between American and British speakers

If we accept the idea of a Standard of Intelligibility, then one of the difficulties experienced by the phoneticians is removed. They used to say that for their purpose one sound was as good or bad as another. But if now it can be proved that one of these is less widely intelligible than the others, then it certainly can be said of this sound that it is bad.

Probably the standard next in importance is what one may call the Social Standard, an idea of which seems to have been present in the minds of those who framed most of the definitions I have quoted. A man's way of speaking, his method of performing the act of speech, his speech, his pronunciation—call it what you will—is as much an aspect of his social behaviour as his fashion of dressing or his manners in eating and drinking. The analogy of dress is interesting, for next to speech it is probably the most significant aspect of our social behaviour. There is a certain uniformity in the dress of all the men present on this occasion, nevertheless no two are alike in every detail. If the occasion is one that is felt to require a greater degree of ceremony, then uniformity will be visibly increased, the men present will wear evening dress, academic dress, or uniform of some kind. Greater latitude in this respect is allowed to women, except in the most ceremonious functions, when the dress to be worn, as at Royal Courts, is prescribed in detail, and very few opportunities for variation are possible. But to revert to the male dress—it would be difficult to describe and define exactly, from an examination of the men present, the principles, ideas, considerations, and habits, conscious and unconscious, present

in the mind of anyone of us when we set out to buy new clothes or to put on such as we have. The primal functions of dress, namely, ornament (which the psychologists give first place) and protection (a bad second), seem to be completely hidden beneath the thick veneer of social considerations, which in its turn is polished according to the varying æsthetic ideals of the individual.

It is easy to pursue the dress analogy a long way, and to find countless parallels. Of the avowed linguists in our country Professor Wyld is probably the one who has most stressed the social aspect of speech, but it is clear that this side of the question is not too well explored. The more light psychologists and others can throw upon the nature of social behaviour, its conventions, its taboos, its fetishes, and its standards, the more we shall understand some of the principles operative in determining social standards in speech.

Nowhere is so much difficulty experienced in assessing criticism of speech as where the criticism is based on social likes and dislikes, for speech behaviour in this country is the most outstanding class distinction remaining. It would be difficult to find prejudice more violent than that which exists against the speech behaviour of a social class with which we are not in sympathy. Nobody willingly adopts the pronunciation of a class which he feels to be inferior to what he imagines his own class to be, unless for humorous or ulterior motives. Many aim at the pronunciation of a higher class, and this, within limitations, is as legitimate a desire as to improve one's standards in other directions. Politicians who pride themselves on the social reforms they have carried out, all with the aim of raising the general standard of life in the humbler classes of society, frequently lament

the passing of some of our country dialects they often blame the B B C, forgetting that they themselves are probably a major factor. You cannot raise social standards without in the end raising speech standards.

Criticism directed at the so-called Oxford accent, at academic speech, at pedantic speech, at clerical speech, at what was called *hawhaw*, but is now called *bla bla*, is merely an expression of lack of sympathy with the whole outlook of the social class which uses any of these unpopular variants.

Speech fashions change rapidly, like all other social fashions, and the young are always adventurous. Young people do not now use pronunciations like *lawss* for "loss", *crawss* for "cross", *cawf* for "cough", although these pronunciations continue to be recorded in dictionaries. I have observed this modernism among educated young people in these parts for many years; it is the generally accepted fashion among the younger generation on the West End stage, whose pronunciations I have had exceptional opportunities of studying for ten years. But I was astonished to find recently, in a Council Central School in London (Marylebone), that the pronunciation *crawss* was laughed at by the children.

Just as we—the no longer young generation—are inclined to ridicule and resent the dress fashions of the younger generation, we resent their speech, and this is one of the most frequent causes of criticism levelled at announcers and others. In recent years I have had to reject many young applicants for announcing posts because their speech had more modernisms than listeners in the country can yet tolerate. Here are some unpopular fashions —

Words like *that*, *hat*, *majesty* sound like *thet*, *het*, *mejesty*. This vowel, the Southern English short *a*,

becomes in the pronunciation of many young people a diphthong [eɪ]. Words like *city*, *city* sound like *city*, *city*. The so-called neutral, or murmur, vowel, that occurs at the end of so many English words, sounds like *aa*. *India* becomes *Indraa*, *orchestra*, *actor*, *singer*, and *weather* become *orchestraa*, *actaa*, *singaa*, and *weathaa*. *Fire* sounds like *faa* and *Ireland* like *aaland*. *Power* becomes *paa* and *Europe* may be anything from *yawrup* to *yearup*. Very notable is the change in the two diphthongs contained in words like *my* and *now*, *my* is changing to *maa-i* and *now* to *naa-u*.

On the other hand there is abundant criticism directed against speakers who have in their pronunciation details that are associated in the popular mind with lack of education. In London the diphthong in words like *How now brown cow* is probably an acid test.

These facts are interesting in themselves, and valuable to the historians of our language as indicative of very powerfully operative tendencies. At the moment, I am almost forced to the conclusion that the average speech of young University men and women is not particularly acceptable to the majority of listeners in the country. It is very clear that the educated people of this country do not all speak the same sort of language, or rather use the same pronunciation, and if we are to accept the usual definition of Standard Pronunciation as being that of the educated, then we must either define the generation or admit that our Standard is a very vague one.

Moreover if we accept the definition, then we are forced to admit that Standard Pronunciation to-day tolerates the use of the intrusive *r*, which seems to be used by the majority of those educated at English public schools and Universities, a characteristic that they share with the lowest class Cockney dialect. *Airmen fly to Australiar*

and back, calling at *Bataviar on the way*, taking *Indiar in their stride*, and crossing *Asiar at record speed*. Miracles are performed at *Canar in Galilee*, and many an *Ehjar* in the oratorio proclaims that he is not better than his *fa-ar-ther*. *The Ottawar Agreement* was a nightly thorn in the flesh of the announcers, and a prominent statesman scattered bushels of *r*'s in the course of a half-hour's talk on India. This *r* is firmly entrenched in what is called Standard Pronunciation. My own son was completely free of it until he went to the fountain head of Standard English, a public school. It is one of the most freely criticized features of modern Southern educated speech, and I receive annually some hundreds of letters directed at this point alone.

But to sum up, it is true of speech, as of many other social conventions, that it is easier to say what disqualifies than what qualifies. I find it easier to choose speakers by observing their bad spots than their good ones. And here, as in every other aspect of social behaviour, although much latitude is allowed, there are some things that simply are not done. You may show a fine independence by wearing Harris Tweeds on occasions that are generally regarded as unsuitable, but you dare not wear brown shoes with a morning coat. So you may scatter your intrusive *r*'s as you please, but you had better not call the *brown cow* a *bre-oon ce-oo*, or ask for a *cap of cowcow*. It isn't done, and that is the end of the matter.

One more word before we leave this aspect of the question. Just as we were entitled to say, from the point of view of the Intelligibility Standard, that certain sounds, rhythms, intonations were good or bad, so we are entitled to say, from the point of view of the Social Standard, that certain details are desirable or undesirable, correct or incorrect. The old attitude of the phonetician, that one pronunciation was as good as another, must give

way to something more in accordance with a just appreciation of the force of social sanctions. Our whole life is dominated and determined by social considerations, how these arise, when they arose, how they change, is beyond our knowledge. We have very little individual control over these matters, it is rather they that control us. The whole force of education in the modern civilized State is directed towards inculcating high ideals and standards of social behaviour, and speech is but one of these. The dual education system of our country, State and private schools, reacts upon our ideas of standard pronunciation, and the steady growth of the State secondary school must cause us to think twice before we accept unquestioningly the traditional definitions of Standard English.

Closely linked with the Social Standard is the *Æsthetic* Standard, concerning which it is difficult for the non-trained layman to say anything. The general principles of *æsthetics* must apply here as in all branches of human activity, and evidence is not wanting that the so-called standard of beauty in speech, which is the standard aimed at by elocutionists and those interested in what is called the Art of Speech, is not a very popular standard. Often it is found to consist of nothing but an over-articulation of details unnecessary for Intelligibility, a needless differentiation in the qualities of unstressed vowels, and the use of forms of intonation that have very little in common with those in general use. Its social colour is tinged with the social aspirations of the performer.

I have dealt with this question more fully in the introduction to a series of gramophone records of Bible readings,¹ in which the attempt has been made to read

¹ Made in collaboration with the Religious Advisory Committee of the B B C, 1932. Published by the Linguaphone Institute. See Ch VI.

the Bible in a way that is free from the unpopular mannerisms adopted by some of the clergy on the one hand and by some elocutionists on the other

The B B C has probably had greater experience in handling the various forms of Spoken English than any individual or body, and it has collected a mass of valuable opinion. Nowhere perhaps is this body of opinion more useful than in the light it throws upon the public attitude to so-called æsthetic standards imposed by those whose main business it is to practise the Art of Speech, namely the elocutionists. They have been the least successful performers, speakers, or readers before the microphone, and have as a rule come off very badly. Probably the reason is to be found in two different directions, firstly, their old technique, which aimed at producing the maximum effect in the large theatre, is quite out of place in the intimacy with which broadcast speech must be carried on, and secondly, there is no accounting for taste, and the performance is nowadays considered artificial.

In Bible reading, the clergy have frequently failed

In verse reading, three classes of reader have been tried: the poet himself, whose success varies, the elocutionist, who is exceedingly unpopular, the ordinary scholarly individual with a taste for poetry and a pronunciation that is free from the mannerisms that I have enumerated above. He succeeds, but he is a very difficult person to find. It is a sad reflection upon our education system, that not one of us, since he left his first school, has ever had a reading lesson, and I should like to suggest that our Schools and Universities should pay at least as much attention to the technique of speech as they do to the technique of the written language. If we are tempted to criticize the announcers, we are criticizing some very representative products of our Universities, and if we are

inclined to condemn their speech then the remedy is in our own hands We must teach them a better speech !

But the amount of criticism on purely æsthetic grounds that I have had to deal with has been negligible This is partly because speakers with harsh, high-pitched, nasal voices are weeded out, and partly because listeners are very little concerned with the purely æsthetic view of speech They become aware of it only when it is thrust at them, and then they generally resent it, unless they had a hand in the making of it As a rule women are more concerned with the æsthetic side of speech than men, which is, I suppose, true also of dress behaviour

It is very clear that the three standards we have examined cannot cover the astonishing variety that exists in the pronunciation of the English language at the present moment in all places and by all speakers If we compare pronunciation with human features then we may have a further useful analogy No two of the forty odd million inhabitants of these islands look exactly alike males differ from females, though the latter show tendencies at times to remove the dissimilarity One age differs from another, and fashions change from generation to generation in details of hairdressing, beard, moustache, etc But despite the lack of resemblance, every one of the millions has something in common, and it is easy to tell an Englishman from a Japanese In the minds of most of us there is a vague picture of the ideal Englishman, who is supposed to contain all that, in our opinion, is best in what again we have to imagine to be the national character This fiction, which is different in the minds of all of us, this John Bull, is rather analogous to the fiction of Standard English Low's version of him in the *Evening Standard* is vastly different from Sir Bernard

Partridge's in *Punch*, just as my idea of Standard English may be different from yours

But despite all these variations, the composite profile arrived at by Professor Karl Pearson, of the Department of Eugenics and Applied Statistics, University College, London, after measurement of thousands of heads, is a very handsome profile indeed. Shorn of all extremes, the composite profile is neither over high nor over low as to the brow, neither long nor short as to the nose. It has no outstanding or startling feature.

The pronunciation I try to teach to the schools of the country in my weekly broadcast lessons is like Professor Karl Pearson's composite profile. I take what I believe to be, in the case of any sound, the acoustic average of the social and local variants that I know of, and try to teach it. This way of arriving at a standard pronunciation may be better than most of us imagine. Speech that is up to this standard is seldom criticized.

If we turn for a moment to what we might call a more "scientific" attitude towards standardization, we are not surprised that, faced with all the chaos that I have been trying to describe, scholars and others have again and again expressed the desire for more tangible, more rigid, more "scientific" (if we may so use the word), more absolute standards. The speech noises that the human apparatus is capable of making are not infinite in number, and every attempt to classify them is in itself a tacit admission of standards. We can talk, for instance, of dental, alveolar, or cerebral *t*'s, aspirated and unaspirated, but who shall decide when an alveolar aspirated *t* ceases to be aspirated and becomes affricated? This may seem a very difficult case, and fine discriminations of sound are always difficult unless they can be decided upon social grounds. It is often hard

to decide whether we are faced with an aspirated *t* or a slightly affricated *t*, but it is easy to decide that *twice one are two* is up to social standard if we hear one kind of *t*, but definitely below standard if we hear the highly affricated *t* so beloved by Cockney young men and especially their young women. It is the kind of *t* that makes a *cup of tea* sound like a *cup of tsea*, and by the same process Cockney *dear dear* ' becomes *dzear dzear* '.

I have found it convenient for practical purposes to divide speech sounds into two classes from the subjective point of view, viz —

- (1) those that involve a tactile sensation in the mouth, or a narrowing of the passage sufficient to convey some sensation of contact
- (2) those in which no such sensation is present

The first class corresponds roughly with consonants, the second with vowels, marginal cases are vowel-like, such as *l* and semi-vowels. If we confine our attention to the vowels, they are acoustic sensations of a different kind from consonants, free from any tactile sensation, the dominant factor being the ear rather than the association of noise with a definite tongue position.

The standardization of human sensations is never easy, and has been successful only in very few cases. Sensations of smell are not standardized, as witness the very limited number of words in the language suitable for the description of smell. A smell cannot be described accurately in words; it can be described only with reference to some smell known to be within the experience of any of us. The same is true of taste, and the adjectives in our language at the disposal of the man who proposes to describe tastes are very limited. If we had more suitable adjectives we should know more about taste.

One aspect of touch sensations, viz temperature, is well standardized, thanks to the existence in nature of two standards, which, in carefully governed circumstances, are moderately constant. Of eye sensations, shapes and distances are fairly well standardized, i.e. it is possible to describe them accurately without reference to themselves, the technical vocabulary exists. It is when we come to colour sensations that the situation most closely resembles what I feel to be that of the ear sensations that we know as vowel sounds, with one important distinction: colour is abundantly equipped with words to describe it, but the vowel sound has none.

Among colour sensations, the normal person can distinguish the colours of the rainbow, violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red, where one merges into the other may be a matter of opinion, but broadly we can tell blue from green and green from yellow. But there is no standard blue, no standard green. Any standard blue or green we wish to make must be an arbitrary standard, and all attempts to compare colours with these arbitrary standards must depend in the end upon the sense organ. Here are some shades of colour used in the research work upon colour vision carried on at the Department of Psychology in the University of Manchester. I am given to understand that there is no "scientific" way of grading them, apart from reference to the eye. The skilled artist, wool sorter, or dye expert may spend an hour in arranging them in progressive order. The sense organ is usually capable of a high degree of training, and when trained, is able to make exceedingly fine discriminations.

It would be quite impossible to describe any one of these shades in words, and to give details of its reflected wavelength is not of much use practically. If you want any

shade then you must see it, and you will be left in the end with nothing except eyes to decide whether or not you have succeeded in matching it

So it is with vowel sounds, which are ear sensations. The normal ear can distinguish certain vowel sounds [i], [e], [æ], [o], [u]. It is physically possible to go through a continuous band of noises, a spectrum of vowels, from [i] to [u] and from [y] to [ɤ], but these sensations have the disadvantage, when compared with colour sensations, of being very fleeting. Here again any standards we choose must be arbitrary. It is only when we have physically independent standards, e.g. boiling and freezing points, that we can use standards that are not arbitrary. The yardstick is a purely arbitrary standard; the metre claims to have more scientific pretension to absoluteness, to have a physical correlate, but when the English standard metre at Twickenham has to be checked, it must be taken to Paris for comparison with the French standard metre. It is of little use measuring the earth's circumference and checking from that.

I have felt it necessary to enlarge on this aspect of the subject because the system of standards in vowel sounds suggested by Professor Daniel Jones, known as the Cardinal Vowel System, has sometimes been attacked as "unscientific" because it is not mathematically devised or capable of measurement and testing by machines. I wish to suggest that it is a valid system of standardization. So far no one has set up standard colours; one colour atlas contains 3,000 specimens and anybody is at liberty to choose any specimen as a standard. The efficacy of a standard is not in the standard itself, but in the extent to which it is accepted. It is quite immaterial whether X-ray photographs do or do not bear out the details of the figure chosen by Professor Jones.

for visually representing his scheme. The shape of a figure can easily be changed, and it has little or nothing to do with the system of Cardinal Vowels. Professor Jones is acting scientifically in choosing his standards, and so long as he has them recorded on shellac, or steel, or film, to be accessible to all who choose to use them, his system is firmly founded on scientific method, and must be regarded as a definite advance into the little explored territory of the standardization of human sensations.

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to go in detail into other standards. But it is clear that in highly civilized states, with a high percentage of literacy, the standard of the visual language must exert a very powerful influence. It has become the fashion among historians of our language to despise and deplore pronunciations that pay regard to the Visual Standard, and to refer to them as "spelling pronunciations." But we must, I fear, recognize that the Visual Standard is bound to exert a much stronger influence in an age of compulsory reading and writing than in an age when these accomplishments were the prerogative of the few. If printing, broadcasting, and compulsory education had all started off together, we might have had a different story, and some of our problems would never have arisen. As it is, the battle rages loud and long, but I cannot find it in my heart to despise the spelling pronunciation as heartily as do some of my colleagues. The influence of the visual is as legitimate as any other influence that has helped to mould the shape of speech. It is more powerful now than formerly because reading is more general. And I am unrepentant that, being asked to decide whether the most important broadcasting station in the world should be called *Daventry* or *Daintry*, I decided in favour of a spelling pronunciation. While there are ten just

men in Daventry, to whom Daventry is *Daventry*, not *Daintry*, then I shall continue to be unrepentant, but when the last of them dies, if ever, I shall recommend to the B B C to change the spelling and pronunciation to *Daintry* and so give us another spelling pronunciation

Far from deploring the powerful psychological influence of the visual standard, I welcome it as the one sure and safe anchorage in a stormy sea, and if for no other reason, I shall be glad to see our spelling reformed. The greater the uniformity in the convention existing between the visual form and the spoken form, i.e. between spelling and pronunciation, the greater the force exerted by the Visual Standard, and the less the tendency to chaos. Historically the sound of *t* followed by a certain short vowel sound best represented simply by *y* changes to a *ch* sound, *nature*, once pronounced something like *nat-yoore*, has become *naychure*. This is a very strongly operative tendency resting on physical causes. But people who speak of *Tuesday* as *chewsday* and the *Tube* as the *chewb*, although behaving within the tradition of our language, are severely criticized. People who speak of *this year* as *thish year*, and say *Is that chawz* when they mean *Is that yours* are often accused of slipshod speech, and here even the most intransigent of the anti-spelling-pronunciation league may vote for a spelling pronunciation. Whether this resistance to change will prevail is not for me to decide, I merely record that there is resistance. And after all, if we are to be consistent, let us admit all non-spelling pronunciations, and welcome with open arms the *Indiar Office* and *Bolviar and Paraguay*.

CHAPTER VI

ON READING ALOUD, WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE BIBLE AND THE
PRAYER-BOOK

*The Introduction to a series of gramophone records¹ of
Biblical passages read by laymen*

“ If it were not for the Bible and Common Prayer Book in the Vulgar Tongue, we should hardly be able to understand anything that was written among us an hundred years ago for those books being perpetually read in Churches have proved a kind of standard for language, especially to the common people And I doubt whether the alterations since introduced have added much to the beauty and strength of the English Tongue, though they have taken off a great deal from that simplicity which is one of the greatest perfections in any language ”—DEAN SWIFT

¹ *Bible Readings* Linguaphone Institute

ON READING ALOUD

It is generally admitted that the art of reading aloud is one not easily acquired, nevertheless, it is an art at which every one of us is compelled, sooner or later, to try his hand. Like the other arts, it suffers much from the passage of time, and fashions of reading that were popular fifty years ago are no longer tolerated; which is, of course, true also of the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, musical composition, acting, and dancing. It is not primarily a creative art, but an interpretative art, like acting or playing the violin, the artist is concerned with the creations of other minds, seeking to express his personality while performing the work of others. Music is composed to be performed, the silent reading of a score being beyond the capacity of any but the highly skilled. Prose and verse, on the other hand, do not rely entirely upon audible performance, for they can be read silently by all literate people, with apparently little or no loss of appreciation. Reading aloud is in reality a form of applied speech—with a difference, and it is necessary to understand this difference if we are to understand the fundamental principles that should underlie a sane conception of the art.

Audible speech is an affair of sound. It is made possible by the physical formation of certain bodily organs, and by the natural phenomenon to which we give the name of Sound. Visual language rests on entirely different principles, and has nothing physical in common with the audible. The one is made by the mouth and apprehended by the ear, the other is made by the hand and apprehended by the eye. The translation of one into terms

of the other is one of the greatest achievements of the human mind. Reading aloud is an exercise in the complex process of expressing visual language in audible terms, a process so important that it forms the basis of education in all civilized communities.

Actual speech is not in any way concerned with the visual language, being conceived and performed without any reference to a visual form of the language. It is a purely aural and audible phenomenon, it is the basis of all language, a fact that is too frequently forgotten. The spoken language in all cases precedes the literary language, and the literary language develops only in highly civilized communities. The cleavage between the one and the other, between what is called the vernacular, on the one hand, and what is called the literary or classical language on the other, is present in all civilized countries, and is at the root of many misunderstandings. It is often said that the vernacular is a debased form of the literary, whereas it is nothing of the sort. If anything, it is a simple form of the language suitable for speech, whereas the other is a complicated form of the language suitable for writing, often rich in archaisms that the spoken tongue has discarded. In all cases the literary language has a very high prestige among the highly educated, indeed, one of the hall-marks of education in civilized communities at all times has been a familiarity with the literary language. But no man uses it for the daily purposes of speech, unless he is a prig and a pedant, similarly, no educated man uses the vernacular for literature, except, of course, when he is reproducing actual speech. The literary language is not usually spoken, and the vernacular language is not written.

Now the reading aloud of the literary language necessitates the translation into sound of a form of

language that is not primarily designed for the purpose. The bones have to be made alive, so to speak, and clothed in the garb of speech. They must be given sounds, rhythm, and intonation, and here at once we are in difficulties, for we have no reserve of these things to draw from other than the store that supplies our daily speech. Intelligibility of speech rests ultimately upon these three component factors, and any considerable variation from the normal, in the case of any one of them, is likely to interfere with intelligibility. This simple fact is too frequently forgotten by people who believe that the audible performance of the literary language should be "beautified", or "refined", or "æsthetic". A beautification that interferes with intelligibility defeats the principal aim of speech, besides being offensive, as an obtruding technique is always offensive. But the ordinary canons of speech do not apply for the following reasons —

- (a) The vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure of the literary language are not those of the vernacular
- (b) Speech can be carried on at a much higher speed than is suitable for reading aloud
- (c) Reading aloud requires, in certain circumstances, much greater loudness than is necessary for speech

These reasons lie at the root of most of the difficulties that attend attempts to translate the literary language into sound. The reader has to steer a safe course between the Scylla of vernacularism and the Charybdis of obtruding technique. And here every man must steer his own course, but he must be prepared to face the judgment of his hearers, who assess his intelligence by the excellence of his steering. The older school set the course rather on the side of technique, whereas modernists swing over to

the other side Political, religious, and dramatic oratory, where the literary language is the medium, have changed very much in the last half-century, and the public reading of Prayer Book and Bible has met with criticism and censure when it has not advanced with the times

The reading of religious literature is further complicated by a factor common to all performance of religious worship, in all times and in all communities as far as we know This is that religious worship usually involves a departure from the normal everyday form of behaviour The architecture of temple and church is unique, the dress of the officiating priest differs from that of the other members of the community, the language is different from that of street and market place, being usually rich in archaisms, handed down from generation to generation In most cases the pronunciation, especially the intonation, is different from that of the vernacular, being often subordinated to some form of musical accompaniment Devoutness is almost invariably associated with departure from the normal course of behaviour, including, of course, speech and language behaviour Advancing civilization tends towards a greater harmony between the everyday and the religious behaviour, in speech as in other details

Such are the general linguistic considerations that should be present in the minds of those who propose to lay the foundations of an art of reading, as applied especially to sacred literature It is certainly not the purpose of this introduction to lay down any rules, the B B C has much to do with reading aloud, especially with the reading of sacred literature, and it has used for this purpose readers of every known style It has collected a large body of critical opinion upon the subject, and, as a result, knows that certain styles of reading are definitely unsuitable for such general diffusion as is

possible through the microphone, either on account of some technical blemish on the speaker's part that makes transmission difficult, or because the adverse criticism they arouse is considerable. It is not easy to describe briefly either the acceptable or the unacceptable varieties, but the series of records under discussion may be regarded as examples of the former. They steer a safe course between the casual treatment that fails to express literary beauty or religious sincerity, and the over-traditional or ultra-clerical that merges all in an expressionless monotony, and they are not "dramatic." Technically they will be found to depart rather less than usual from the normal performance of the vernacular in sounds, rhythm, and intonation, a fact, of course, rendered all the easier of achievement because they are performed in the studio, where the voice need never be louder than that used in conversation. However suitable they may be for the studio, or for any other occasion, we must recognize that they may not be either suitable or even possible in the cathedral, with its large spaces and resounding echoes, which so often defeat even the loudest voices. The increasing use of microphones and amplifiers in churches and large buildings is to be welcomed, because they lead to greater intelligibility on the part of the congregation, the expenditure of much less energy on the part of the speaker, and the use of a form of language that is, by this reason alone, less out of sympathy with the speech of educated people than that forced upon the speaker who is compelled to shout, and in shouting to distort sounds, rhythm, and intonation. It is not mere fancy—it is indeed possibly sound linguistics—to see connection between habitual preaching and the so-called clerical accent. This most unpopular of accents is characterized by deviations from the normal in each of

the three factors mentioned above, and it might be well to glance at them and see how they arise

Sounds —The chief offending member is the unaccented vowel, the so-called neutral vowel that is so characteristic of English and so rare in other languages. It occurs in the initial syllable of words like

around, *above,* *surround,*

the medial syllable of words like

tolerate, *decadence,* *emanate,*

the final syllable of words like

actor, ever, singer, idea, fear, future,

and thousands of others

The sound itself is short, and is made with the lower jaw in a position quite different from that occupied in the formation of accented vowels. Any attempt to slow down its speed usually results in a serious difference in its quality, as is apparent from observation of singers who have to sing it on a long or accented note¹. Similarly the preacher, or public speaker, is perpetually in difficulties with it, and especially when it occurs in the final position where the temptation to dwell on it is irresistible. It cannot be a lengthened version of itself, and so it must assume the quality of a stressed vowel, that varies from speaker to speaker and from word to word. The favourite variety is the long *aa*, it makes *ever* sound like *evaa*, *scripture* becomes *scriptichaa*, and *idea* becomes *ideaa*. Under the influence of this baneful tendency a word like *actor* may become either *actaa*, or indeed *actaw*, for here spelling steps in and gives the floundering orator or uncertain singer some imaginary support, leading to such fanciful pronunciations as *pictewaa*, *natewaa*, *literatewaa*,

¹ E.g. the last syllable of *delicate* in "The Lass with the Delicate Air", in Arne's setting

which their devotees fondly believe to be better in some mysterious way than those used in the speech of ordinary educated people

The four diphthongs in words like *fear*, *fair*, *four*, and *poor* all contain the neutral vowel as their second element, and here the introduction of the *aa* version leads to such pronunciations as *feaa*, *faaa*, *foaa*, and *pooaa*, although the last two tend to become monophthongs, and to sound like *faw* and *pau*. The two triphthongs in words like *fire* and *power* play fantastic tricks under the influence of the *aa* vowel, *fire* being often pronounced *faa* and *power* *paa*, in *ku aas* and places where they sing

It must not be imagined that this *aa* vowel belongs only to so-called clerical English, it is very widely spread among educated speakers of a certain class, and is the one invariable symptom of what is known as the Oxford accent. It is the most unpopular sound in English to-day, and a very large proportion of the criticism directed at many broadcast speakers is aimed at this point. The stage comedian is sure of a laugh if he burlesques this peculiarity of pronunciation and it is lamentable that any feature of behaviour associated with religious worship should be the object of ridicule. In the minds of the great majority of English people to-day, this style of pronunciation stands for unctuous social and moral superiority, it is too great a departure from ordinary speech behaviour to be accepted as genuine.

One other vowel, that in words like *bird*, shows a marked tendency to become *aa* in this style of pronunciation, *church* becomes *charch* just as formerly *person* became *parson*. It is not difficult to see the logical conclusion of this tendency if it is allowed to develop, English will be reduced to a language of one vowel sound enriched with a few consonants. This may in a thousand years

increase its chance of becoming a world language, but at present it serves merely to annoy most of us, to invite ridicule, and to endanger intelligibility

The other idiosyncrasies of this style of pronunciation are less obtrusive than the *aa* complex. There is a tendency to rhyme *quite* with *eight*, offset by the opposite tendency to make *quite* and *quiet* homophonous, and to pronounce them both as *quaat*, which brings us back to the *aa* vowel again. There is a tendency to pronounce the long *o* diphthong (in *no*, *know*, for example) in a way that defeats description in print, and to use this sound in the word *knowledge*, calling it *nôlege* instead of *nollege*. There is the further tendency to pronounce the short *a* vowel (in words like *man*, *van*, *have*, etc.) too much like an *e*, and to make the difference between *man* and *men* rest not upon vowel quality, but upon length. Singular and plural have almost the same vowel, but the singular has additional length. There is also the tendency to pronounce *God* as *Gud*.

The consonant sounds behave moderately well in this style of pronunciation, but a departure from the normal in respect of the *l* sound is a very prevalent characteristic. This is of too technical a nature to be described here, or to be represented without a phonetic alphabet. It consists of using in all positions the version of the sound that is generally used before vowels. This is the general practice in certain Irish dialects, just as the reverse practice (that of using the Southern post-vowel form) is general in Scotland and America. Notorious offenders in this respect are singers and elocutionists. The idea probably comes from the French and Italian singing teacher, for there is no sound in standard French or Italian that resembles the Southern English post-vowel *l*.

Lastly there remains to be mentioned the *r* sound that

is so often silent when it might be sounded, and so often pronounced when it does not exist in the literary language. In what is vaguely called Standard English, or Received English, or the English of the Public Schools, or Acceptable English, or Educated Southern English, the *r* sound is pronounced only when it stands before vowels. Thus it is pronounced in *red* and *very*, but is silent in *car* and *card*. It is a very common final letter in English words, and when such words are followed by a word beginning with a vowel, practice varies. In *Westminster Abbey*, for example, the *r* is pronounced by some and not by others, and this optional liaison leads to false liaisons in places where there is no justification for a liaison at all. So we hear *the idear is*, *Dianar of the Ephesians*, *Elijahr is*, *a toccatar and fugue*. This intrusive *r*, which insinuates itself so frequently after the neutral vowel, and less frequently after the *aw* vowel (*the lawr of Moses*) and the *aa* vowel, is deplorably common among educated Southerners, and is by no means confined to the style of pronunciation that we are discussing here, but it is so often heard in churches that notice should be taken of it. It is particularly offensive to the majority of the English-speaking world, for the minds of most people are free from the complex that leads Southerners, many of whom are so precise as to the quality and quantity of vowels in words derived from Latin and Greek, to commit as horrible a solecism as it is possible to imagine. Worse than the false quantity, that bugbear of the pedant, is the false liaison!

Rhythm—It is not easy to define rhythm, which is almost axiomatic. Definitions range from "the rum-tum-tumminess of things" to "an impression of regularity produced upon the mind of an observer by a sequence of events in time". One may be aware of rhythm in the

world outside, or conscious of it in the world within. Most human activities seem to be subordinate to some system of regularity, to which we give the name of rhythm, and the complex physical processes involved in performing the act of speech are probably as much under this influence as are walking and breathing. Rhythm in speech is evidently primarily subjective, governing the muscular adjustments of the speaker on lines laid down by the historical development of the language that he and his ancestors have spoken. This rhythmic performance is perceived objectively by the listener as a series of acoustic impressions or stimuli, following one another in regular fashion, the rhythmic nature of the sequence forming a considerable factor in intelligibility. If this expected sequence is disturbed, through physical or mental defect, through unfamiliarity, through inability owing to rhythmic habits of another language acquired in youth, or through false ideas of beautification, then intelligibility is endangered.

The basis of the rhythm of any literary language is the natural rhythm of the vernacular. A language which has long and short vowels and a vigorous accent of prominence can develop iambs, trochees, dactyls, and the rest of them. A language that has no significant variations of syllabic length, and no vigorous accent of prominence, will have to look elsewhere for the terms to describe its metrical structure. The wedding of musical rhythm to speech rhythm is a delicate affair, for the principles involved are slightly different in essence, but this is the province of the musician. As a rule this harmonization of the two rhythmic systems is done better in the setting of psalms than in the setting of hymns. In the reading of Bible and Prayer Book there is usually very little distortion of natural language

rhythm. Indeed, the intoning of certain prayers tends to accentuate the rhythm, and to bring out the full beauty of this very remarkable feature of English. But slowing down the tempo, the consequent disturbance of relative vowel lengths, and the replacement of the neutral vowel by either the *aa* sound or another stressed vowel, are all dangerous tendencies that have to be kept in mind, and well under control. The prevalent fashion of lengthening out the neutral vowel into an *aa*, thus making syllables that should be short long, makes a natural iambus or a trochee into a spondee. This is, for slightly different reasons, characteristic of the rhythm of modern American English.

Intonation —It is probably here that the language used in public worship differs most from the vernacular. Intonation is essentially a function of the spoken, not of the visual, word, its purpose being to lend to bare words subtle shades of emotional emphasis that the printed words can in no way convey. It is impossible to make the barest statement in speech without an intonation of some kind, and it is only within recent years that this element of speech has been studied in detail. This normal unemphatic intonation is a very vital part of our living language, so accustomed are we to it that we become aware of it as a rule only when we hear a foreigner speak our language with an intonation that is not native. The broad outlines of the intonations of English, French, German, and Italian are well known, and they differ very considerably one from another. The further modifications imposed upon the normal form by the desire to ask questions, to bring out contrasts, to throw certain parts of the idea expressed into prominence or obscurity, to suggest mental states varying from sorrow to anger, from command to supplication—

these are all well defined and determined, despite the fact that our exact knowledge of them is up to the present rather limited. But however little linguistic science knows of the detail, we are all very susceptible to the facts, for we are probably more delicately sensitive to intonation, and all the thousand and one subtleties of relationship between us and the speaker that are expressed by intonation alone, than we are to any other component element of speech. This attitude is summed up in the popular saying—"It isn't so much what he says as the way he says it." That way, or at least 90 per cent of the way, is intonation.

Since intonation is so accurate, so subtle, and so human an instrument for the expression of personality, it is not surprising that the public performance of religious worship in most countries rejects the intonation of the street and market place, and substitutes some form of melody or monotone that is evidently intended to prevent the personality of the performer from obtruding itself upon the audience. It is not considered devout to address deities as one would address one's fellow-men, and there is usually, in consequence, a special intonation for the language used in divine worship. The problem is further complicated as it applies to the reading of the literary language, for here the sentence structure, vocabulary, syntax, and possibly word order, are not those of the vernacular. The vernacular must supply the material, but the exact pattern must be made to fit the strange shape of the literary language. Moreover, the sentiments expressed in literature are usually far removed from those expressed in the daily rough-and-tumble of life, and intonations that have become associated with the latter will, for that reason alone, be regarded as unsuitable for the former.

Here, then, is a situation rich in possibilities, and fraught with countless perils for the unwary, a situation that sooner or later every one of us must handle as best he can, with very little guidance, very little help from the scientific linguist—although it is a purely linguistic problem—and with only a very vague understanding of the æsthetic and emotional implications of intonation and the part it plays in speech. We are obsessed with one idea, to steer clear of the intonations of the vernacular, with their banal associations and their trivial contexts, but what to do next is the rub. The only charted course is that prescribed by long usage, along which travels the main burden of speech traffic. We can keep close to this, or sail farther out to sea on more or less parallel lines, or as a last resort we can ignore it, and, trusting to luck, shape our own course with no reference to existing custom. It is not possible in a non-technical introduction such as this to go into detail, or to give minute examples, we can do no more than note tendencies, and express them as clearly as possible in non-technical language. Those who wish to go into the matter in greater detail must study the scientific literature, and make this the groundwork of their philosophy in the matter of the public reading of sacred literature, and those who teach the reading and reciting of prose or verse would probably find this scientific knowledge a safer foundation than vague emotional and æsthetic yearnings. Briefly, it is the experience of the B B C that the most successful readers are those who depart least from the intonation behaviour of the spoken language, within, of course, the limitations already laid down.

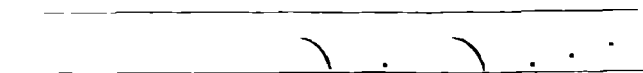
Every normal statement of fact expressed in English speech must be spoken on an intonation of some kind,

in which the range of pitches varies from that used on the first accented syllable to that used on the last. In a general sense it may be said that the degree of emotion it is intended to convey is expressed by the range of pitch. The greater the difference between high and low pitches used in the statement, the greater the degree of emotion, *ceteris paribus*. In speech the pitch is almost always changing; long monotones are the exception, being reserved as a rule for those portions of the statement that are regarded as parenthetical to the main fact. The use of monotone in the reading of sacred literature is one, therefore, that requires the greatest caution, and yet it appears so frequently to be the only resort of the reader. Careful analysis shows that in speech the final stressed syllable in a statement is very rarely given out on a monotone, but nearly always on a falling tone.

Perhaps a practical example will make it clearer. It is quite easy to imagine the following sentence being used in ordinary conversation, say as the opening of a story —

“A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Give me what is coming to me.’”

As a plain narrative told in the street by one man to another, the intonation would be something as follows, on a skeleton musical stave, with only relative pitches marked —



“A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them



said to his father, ‘Give me what is coming to me.’”

There are three sense groups in this division, and they follow the normal intonation behaviour of sense groups in English. A falling pitch denotes a sense group that is final in the sense that in the mind of the speaker an idea is complete, a rising pitch at the end of a sense group usually indicates that the idea is not complete, and the listener is left in the expectation of something to follow. Every reader does not divide his sense groups in the same way, nor do we all have the same views as to what constitutes a complete or incomplete idea. It would be quite easy, for instance, to divide the above sentence into two sense groups, and it would be perfectly simple, using the division above mentioned, to use a rising pitch on "sons", carrying the idea over to the next group before completion. In the intonation indicated above there is an emphasis on "younger" shown by the use of a falling pitch in the body of a sense group, and the rising pitch on "father" shows that there is more to come before this portion of the sense is complete.

Now let us imagine this sentence to be the opening of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, to be read as sacred literature. This is an interesting experiment that every man who has to read aloud should carry out, observing the results as best he can, but being aware that without special phonetic training it is very hard indeed to make accurate observation upon his own speech behaviour. The first effect of reading the passage as sacred prose is to level out the range of pitch used in the vernacular, and possibly to remove the emphasis on "younger". Read in this way, with what one may call a more sombre tone colour, the passage can be performed adequately, and indeed beautifully, as religious prose. But this levelling tendency is too often overdone, and long

monotones result, in fact, a very careful examination of clerical pronunciation in reading the Bible and the Prayer Book has convinced the writer that next to the *aa* vowel, the feature most conspicuous in the public mind, most criticized, and most disliked, is the use of monotones for the rising and falling pitches used at the end of sense groups in the vernacular. Other fanciful treatments of this intonation detail are prevalent in much of present-day Bible reading, and are in their turn also responsible for the widespread dislike of the speech behaviour associated with religious worship. We may sum it up by saying that if we conceive normal English intonation as a theme with variations, the variations used in the reading of religious prose should not so far depart from the theme as to be unrecognizable. There are no set rules that govern composers who propose to indulge in this form of musical exercise, but it is quite easy to see how in the hands of a master the same theme may be sombre or florid, grave or gay, tragic or humorous, being all the while recognizable as the original theme. The same should be true of speech music, or intonation, but we know too little about this subject as yet. There are good and bad speech musicians amongst us, trained and untrained, church music has received attention, and possibly the time has come for something to be done in the matter of church speech music.

This is a very rudimentary and incomplete analysis of a certain type of speech behaviour, it is possibly the first of its kind, and is for that reason alone to be received with cautious inspection. We are all much more susceptible to the speech behaviour of other people than we have ever imagined, while usually completely unaware of the slightest detail in our own, and the association of one form of speech behaviour with religious

worship, common throughout the world and in communities less civilized than our own, is one that must react very sharply upon the public attitude to religion in these days of emancipation and freedom of inquiry. Much of the apparent lack of sympathy between one class and another is due to difference of speech behaviour. In the wide field of general linguistics we are slowly beginning to realize, dimly as yet, all that is meant when we are told that we cannot understand what is at the back of people's minds unless we can think in their language. This is true not only of foreign nations, but of the various social orders within one language-area. Class differs from class nowhere more fundamentally than in speech, and while the speech so frequently associated with religious worship is the object of reproach, contempt, dislike, or ridicule, there must always remain the danger that religious worship performed in speech of this kind will arouse emotions vastly different from those intended.

CHAPTER VII

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT MINORITY LANGUAGES
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WELSH

An article written for the B B C Year Book, 1934

“ Amongst the nations whose history is known, there is hardly a single people which has not changed its language at least once, and generally more than once ”

MEILLET

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT MINORITY LANGUAGES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WELSH

Language is not by any means the perfect instrument that it is sometimes held to be. For the purposes of imaginative literature, prose or verse, it serves its purpose quite adequately, but when it comes to the relation of events, the statement of facts, the expression, that is, of what passes muster as the "truth" about this or that, then language is a deceiver, for when we have done our best with it, it will in the end betray us. Wars have been fought and men have gone to the stake over the meanings of words. The printed word is bad, but the spoken word is worse, a tone of voice, a disturbance of the normal rhythms, hesitation over a consonant, a lift of the eyebrow, and the damage is done. The body of our words may affirm, but their spirit denies.

And so it is never easy to come by the "truth", or indeed to describe what you imagine it to be. "Tell us the truth about Russia," says the man in the street, and as the torrent of words, spoken or written, grows in turbulence, the conviction grows that there may be no such thing as the "truth" about Russia, or that what there is is beyond observation and relation.

What is the truth about minority languages like Welsh, Lithuanian, Finnish, Fante, and Irish, in the year 1934? Can we relate, let us say, the revival of the Esthonian language with the World Monetary and Economic Conference? Could the impartial Martian, gazing down from his own planet, present the truth about a world in which he saw a session of the League of Nations at

Geneva, a Nazi demonstration in Berlin, a National Eisteddfod in Mountain Ash, and a broadcast lesson on King's English, all taking place at the same time as Mr Gandhi was fasting in India ?

We fail to find the truth, and fail to express what little we see, so we join in the hunt for a philosophy, hoping at least to find conviction, failing which we abandon ourselves to the easier life of sentimental judgments

There are those who believe that the only goal for humanity is the abolition of racial and national misunderstandings, the reign of peace and goodwill among men. Such people have strong views about minority languages and nationalist movements. They tell us that we have seen in our generation Western Civilization nearly destroyed in the clash of political nationalism, and the normal life of millions made unbearable through the failure of economic nationalism, and what is there to be expected of linguistic nationalism ? There are others who believe that the future of the world is with small national, political, and economic groups, with self-supporting communities, and self-contained cultures, which, while preserving the heritage of their past, strive to adjust themselves to changing conditions. Such people have other views about minority languages.

And who shall tell us whether Ireland is "right" in reviving her dying language, whether Wales is "right" in wanting a national transmitter for Welsh alone, whether Mustapha Kemal is "right" in sacrificing the sacred alphabet of Islam in favour of the Roman, whether it is "right" to educate the millions of Africa through the medium of their countless tongues, or "right" to teach them all one of the great European tongues ?

It is as difficult to produce a true answer to these

questions as it is to produce the truth about Russia, for there may be no such thing. If it is helpful to cut down a few trees in order to see the wood, then we might remember that language is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. There may be differing views as to what the end is, but few will dispute that one end is communication, and if that is so, then this end is best served by the language that is most current among the people who have most to communicate.

And we might further remember that thought and language have more in common than meets the eye. The Greek language was admirable for the expression of Greek thought because both grew up together, whether the German language can express Greek thought equally well, or whether the Greek language could express German thought, are questions upon which there may be grave doubt. Every national language, from Telugu to Korean, is the best medium for the expression of its national ideals, aspirations, philosophies, and creeds, and it takes a long time before a language can adequately express a creed or philosophy that has not grown up with it. What Christianity has done for the English language is nearly as much as what the English language has done for Christianity. There are certainly Welsh sentiments that cannot be expressed in English, but there are equally certainly English sentiments that cannot be expressed in Welsh. Christianity, as we know it, cannot as yet be adequately expressed in Swahili; there is not the verbal means.

So, in one way or another, many national languages break down as means of communication, and the business—material, intellectual, and spiritual—of the world is carried on in the language of those who have most to communicate. Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek,

Latin, Arabic, Chinese, and English have all in their day spread beyond the lands that gave them birth, carrying with them the creeds, philosophies, literatures, and cultures that were enshrined in them, and that were in part dependent for their nature and content upon the grammars and vocabularies in which they were expressed. No language has had so romantic a history as English, which was itself, not so long ago, very much of a minority language, fighting with its back to the wall.

At present it looks as though Western thought and knowledge will dominate the world for many centuries, and while this is so, one or other of the big Western languages will spread, while countless minority languages will fight, with varying success, their rear-guard actions. They will all, in time, go down fighting, but some, like Roland at Roncesvalles, will, with their dying breath, sound the magic horn that will be heard in the far corners of the earth.

It is not easy to estimate the relative ages of languages. The youngest may be English, and the oldest may be Welsh, for all we know—two that have existed side by side in this island since English was born. English has gone to the ends of the world, and added something to the vocabulary of every language under the sun. Welsh has, with one exception, stayed at home, and no languages come to enrich their vocabulary from it. It has, like many another fighting language, produced an imperishable literature, it is alive and vigorous, spoken daily by hundreds of thousands, it continues to produce literature in prose and verse, and in it are enshrined that Celtic imagination, fervour, and devoutness that have exerted such a remarkable influence upon the literature of Europe since the days of Arthur and the Round Table. It is not what is generally known as an "easy" language,

none of the Celtic languages were. The very complexity of its structure, and its remoteness in form and appearance from either the Teutonic or the Romance languages, are in themselves serious obstacles to its expansion. The future is with simple languages, for it is a fallacy to imagine that complex grammars are necessary for exactitude in expression. Few grammars are as complicated as those of the Bantu languages of Africa, and few as simple as English and Chinese. Advancing civilization makes for simplification of grammatical structure, and in the end the simplest wins. For language is a means to an end, those who make it an end in itself are pedants.

Such are some of the considerations that pass through the mind of one whose duty it is to study some aspects of speech and language in their social and national bearing upon the life of individuals and nations all the world over. It may be possible for such a one to review the matter quite impartially when it concerns a minority language in Africa. But when it comes nearer home, our specialist may not be quite so impartial, for it may be that Welsh was the daily speech of his father and mother, and that the Mabinogion first opened his eyes to the beauty of medieval romance.

A famous scholar has recently said that what the world needs to-day is many more dead languages. This may be true, but languages, like Charles the Second, take an unconscionable time to die.

SOME BOOKS ON LINGUISTIC PHONETICS

English

- JONES *An Outline of English Phonetics* Heffer
WARD *The Phonetics of English* Heffer
RIPMAN *English Phonetics* Dent
LLOYD JAMES *English Speech* Linguaphone Institute
Broadcast English, vols 1, II, III, IV B B C
KENYON *American Pronunciation* Wahr, Michigan
KRAPP *Pronunciation of Standard English in America*
Oxford Press
ARMSTRONG and WARD *Handbook of English Intonation*
Heffer
PALMER *English Intonation* Heffer

French

- ARMSTRONG *The Phonetics of French* Bell
NICHOLSON *Introduction to French Phonetics* Macmillan
GEDDES *French Pronunciation* Oxford Press
LLOYD JAMES *Historical Introduction to French Phonetics*
University of London Press
CONSTENOBLE and ARMSTRONG *Studies in French Intonation* Heffer
KLINGHARDT and DE FOURMESTRAUX *Exercises in French Intonation* Heffer

German

- VIETOR *German Pronunciation* Reisland, Leipzig
MLYER *Deutsche Gespräche* Reisland
SIEBS *Rundfunkaussprache* Berlin
SIEBS *Deutsche Bühnenaussprache Hochsprache* Ahn,
Cologne
BARKER *Handbook of German Intonation* Heffer

Spanish

- NOVARRO TOMÁS *Pronunciación Española* Madrid
STIRLING *Pronunciation of Spanish* Cambridge Press

Italian

- PANCONCELLI-CALZIA *Italiano* Teubner, Leipzig
RIPMAN *Rapid Italian Course* Dent

202 SOME BOOKS ON LINGUISTIC PHONETICS

Russian

TROFIMOV and JONES *Pronunciation of Russian* Cambridge Press

Arabic

GAIRDNER *Phonetics of Arabic* Oxford Press

African Languages

WESTERMANN and WARD *Phonetics for Students of African Languages* Oxford Press

The following works are all accompanied by gramophone records

Chinese

BRUCE *Chinese Course* Linguaphone Institute

Persian

WOLSELEY HAIG *Persian Course* Linguaphone Institute

Hindustani

GRAHAME BAILEY *Hindustani Course* Linguaphone Institute

Bengali

SUTTON PAGE *Bengali Pronunciation* Linguaphone Institute

Japanese

YOSHITAKE *Japanese Pronunciation* Linguaphone Institute

Hausa

BARGER *Hausa Pronunciation* Linguaphone Institute

Efik

WARD and EKPENYON *Efik Pronunciation* Linguaphone Institute

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